

魔王都市の女王

志瑞祐

Illustration

メ鯖コハダ

キャラクター原案

桜はんぺん

# 剣舞の精霊使

ブレイドダンス



MF文庫





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桃源郷のようなその光景に、  
カミトの頭は一瞬ハニックになり、  
その場で固まった。



「……っふふああつ！  
カ、カミト、ななな、  
なにしてるのよ！」







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# Prologue

Fragments of memories left behind by the Demon Slayer.

The final moments of the girl who had saved the world, revered as the Sacred Maiden—

"Master..."

"Don't make... that kind of face... Est."

After countless trials and tribulations, mountains of innumerable corpses had accumulated on the bloodstained battlefields.

In the end, the body of the maiden who had vanquished the Demon King was turning into a pure spirit crystal.

There was not the slightest shred of surprise in the girl's eyes.

Because she already knew.

That was the only fate awaiting her after fulfilling her mission as the Sacred Maiden.

All contractors of the ultimate sacred sword were doomed to an untimely end. As such, one could consider it a cursed sword too.

Nevertheless, the girl seemed to accept it all, simply smiling serenely.

"It's not... your... fault."

Her fingers, stained with the Demon King's splattered blood, gently caressed Est's silver hair.

However, those fingertips soon turned into hard spirit crystals.

"Farewell, Est... My one and only eternal friend."

"...No... Master... *Areishia*!!!"

"...Fufu... I'm hearing you say my name for the first time, you know... I'm so..."

happy."

Overflowing tears slid across her cheeks, falling on her neck that had already crystallized.

This was her first time to shed tears ever since she took on her mission as the Sacred Maiden.

"Est... I... I..."

Her facial expression seemed to be crying and smiling. The girl's lips slowly fluttered.

"To be honest, I never wanted to be some kind of Sacred Maiden."

These were the final words of the girl known as the Sacred Maiden.

They were a cry from her heart, her innermost thoughts, revealed to her only close friend.

And so, the Demon Slayer sealed her own existence away.

Never again would she allow anyone to enter a contract with a cursed demon sword.

Never again would she allow herself to lose someone precious.

Never again would she open her heart to anyone.

Thus, she solemnly swore.



# Chapter 1 - Est's Dream

## Part 1

"Nnn... Ooh, nnn..."

On a giant canopied bed, Kamito was groaning in discomfort.

Kamito partially opened his eyes and cast his gaze at the window.

The sky was gradually brightening. Dawn's rays were shining on the walls of the small town.

...I didn't get much deep sleep, huh? After some time, he began to dream again.

However, this dream did not leave a very clear impression behind. No matter how hard he tried, he could not recall.

(...The sword... and the girl... It somehow feels like an incredibly sad dream...) Muttering to himself in his thoughts, Kamito used a towel to wipe the massive amount of sweat he had perspired during his sleep.

Then Kamito slowly sat up and removed the shirt he had been wearing for the night.

Three days had passed since the battle against Leviathan, the strategic-class spirit released by Sjora Kahn. Kamito and company were staying at Mordis, the stronghold city, and the sleepless nights continued.

Since water spirits were practically absent from this place, the nights were also unbearably hot.

Next to his pillow was a spirit crystal he had borrowed from Rinslet to release

cold air, but the sealed ice spirit, unable to bear the desert's harsh heat, had escaped from the spirit crystal long ago.

Sighing lightly, Kamito, returned the long empty spirit crystal to his pocket.

Putting on a fresh shirt, Kamito lay down on the bed again.

"I used to be able to sleep soundly no matter how uncomfortable the environment..."

During his days as an assassin raised by the Instructional School, he could sleep soundly anywhere, whether damp caves or forests in the pouring rain. By the time he knew it, his body had gotten used to ordinary life at Areishia Spirit Academy.

"...The Academy, huh?"

Kamito naturally looked up at the ceiling, muttering to himself.

"It's been a very long journey."

Instead of his memories from the Instructional School, where he had spent the majority of his life, what suddenly surfaced in his mind was— Bits and pieces of life since enrolling in the Academy several months ago after Greyworth summoned him.

Forming a contract with Est in the cave. Obtaining victory with his comrades of Team Scarlet, earning the right to participate in the Blade Dance tournament. The deadly battles against Muir, Leonora and Nepenthes Lore on Ragna Ys. Rubia's reveal of the plan to assassinate the Elemental Lords.

"That's right, we freed Elemental Lords who were tainted by the Otherworldly Darkness—"

Having emerged victorious from the Blade Dance and granted an audience with the Elemental Lords, Kamito had liberated the berserk Fire Elemental Lord, but losing Restia as the price.

After that, there was the incident where former Numbers knight Lurie Lizaldia and the Holy Kingdom cardinal Millennia Sanctus attacked the Academy, followed by the battle in Laurenfrost territory and finding Restia again. They were then caught up into the conspiracy of the Ordesian throne's succession,



and currently on the run, pursued by the Empire.

"An almost absurd set of experiences. And it's only been a couple months—"

Incredibly, he was starting to miss his days attending lectures in classrooms, shopping at the Academy town.

His classmates in Raven Class, Carol the maid, homeroom teacher Ms Freya. In addition, there was Greyworth with whom he had crossed blades at the canyon in Dracunia—What were they all doing now?

How unbelievable all the details he could remember about everyone.

In the bed, something seemed to be moving—

"...What?"

Kamito hastily flipped the blanket—

"Good morning, Kamito."

"E-Est?"

Sort of crouching or kneeling, the creature in the bed was a sword spirit, naked except for a pair of kneesocks.

Her clear violet eyes stared motionlessly at Kamito.

Blushing at the sight of Est's naked body, Kamito frantically looked away.

Est would often slip into Kamito's bed whenever she wanted. Due to Kamito's recent reminders, Est had gradually reduced such occurrences down to about twice a week.

Normally, Kamito would scold Est and order her to return to her sword form.

"..."

"Est?"

But right now, Est seemed a bit different from usual.

From her eyes whose emotions could not be read, staring at him, Kamito could sense faint wavering.

"Did something happen?"

"A dream."

"A dream?"

Kamito asked in surprise.

"Was it a scary dream?"

"I do not know."

Est expressionlessly shook her head.

"A dream from a very long time ago."

"..."

—A past dream. Then it probably took place before Kamito and Est's encounter. For a spirit like Est, who had lived for thousands of years, her concept of "the past" was incomparable to what humans could understand.

However, Est was currently separated from her main body, thus preventing her from accessing the majority of her memories. It was very likely that this dream was a means to express the past memories that Est had lost.

"What was the dream like?"

"I forgot. I only remember it was a very sad dream."

"I see..."

She must have sneaked into his bed because she experienced a dream whose content she could not remember, but still left her with unease.

If that was the case, there was no helping it—Kamito shrugged and suddenly thought of something.

(The dream I had just now... That's—)

Kamito's gaze settled on the *spirit seal* carved on his right hand.

A rare portion of elementalists were able to share memories with their contracted spirits. The dream Kamito had just experienced might have been a memory from Est's main body.

(...!?)

He was suddenly struck by intense pain in his brain. A vague image flashed in



his mind. However, he still could not recall the content of the dream. Still, remnant emotion resembling sadness lingered in his mind.

"...Kamito?"

Est looked up at Kamito's face and brushed her fingertips across his cheek.

Kamito gently took her hand and held it.

"May I stay here?"

"Y-Yeah, but, umm... You've got to put on some clothes."

"Yes, Kamito."

In front of Kamito, who was speaking with a blush, Est nodded while quietly murmuring an incantation in spirit language.

In the next instant, particles of light surrounded Est's naked body— "Is this acceptable?"

Est conjured a loose-fitting shirt, draped over her shoulders.

"...O-Of all things, why a white shirt!?"

Kamito turned red and exclaimed in panic. Clad in a shirt too big for her, the half-naked kneesocks spirit looked in some ways even more scandalous than fully nude.

"Not allowed to sleep in the Academy uniform."

"Well, I guess you have a point."

Looking closely at Est's shirt, Kamito noticed it was constructed using Kamito's own shirt as a reference.

...Naturally, it was the wrong size.

But dressed like that—





She looked like she was not wearing any underwear.

(...Uh, if I take a closer look, she might not be wearing any!?) Est's round bottom flashed before Kamito's eyes.

What he had glimpsed was probably without underwear, no, she clearly was not wearing underwear.

"Sheesh, you've got to create underwear too!"

Kamito cried out frantically.

"Understood. Constructing."

A pair of pure white panties appeared in Est's hand.

While Est was holding the ribbon, putting on her panties, producing the rustling of fabric in the meantime...

"Good grief..."

Kamito breathed a sigh of relief the moment Est finished.

He could hear boots, the sound of someone's powerful footsteps in the passage outside the room.

Not the loafers that Claire and the girls wore as prescribed by the Academy. Instead, they were steel-toed combat boots—the footsteps of Rubia Elstein.

(W-Why Rubia, of all people...!?)

Kamito panicked. If Rubia were to see him in such circumstances, surely all kinds of misunderstandings would arise.

"Est, sword! Turn back into a sword!"

"...? Kamito, I cannot wear panties like that."

"Forget about panties!"

"Then I should remove the panties?"

"T-That's not what I mean..."

In that instant, the door to the room was violently flung open.

"Ren Ashbell, we are holding an emergency war conference. To the great hall

immediately... What the!?"

The moment Rubia Elstein opened the door, she froze.

In front of her was a naked sword spirit dressed in a shirt, in the middle of removing her panties, and Kamito, desperately pushing her down.

## Part 2

The border region between the Alphas Theocracy and the Quina Empire was a vast desert. This wide expanse of land, with its broken leylines, forsaken by the power of spirits, was known in spirit language as "Ghul-a-val," meaning the Desert of Red Death.

Due to the violent demon beasts living in the desert and the red sandstorms howling and raging throughout the daytime, even the greedy Theocracy merchants had no choice but to take a detour along the coast when traveling to the Quina Empire. From the Quina Empire's standpoint, Ghul-a-val was the giant obstacle and only reason why they had not annexed the vast lands of the continent's center.

This was the most desolate land on the continent, inhospitable to spirits, much less humans.

In this desert, two travelers were walking aimlessly.

"Hey princess, is that thing really in this shithole? We've walked around for how many days now and it'd be shit outta luck to die here out in the open."

"According to Theocracy lore, the Demon King's Tomb is believed to lie in Ghul-a-val. When one who is truly worthy makes a visit, the Tomb will reveal itself—"

Walking behind the young man, the girl replied to his profanity-laced query.

There was a veil over the girl's face. The girl had cast protection to envelope the two of them, defending them from the wind. Under such a powerful sandstorm, it felt only slightly reassuring.

The young man's gaze turned sharp immediately.

"As a member of the royal family, you're supposed to be worthy, right?"

"...This I do not know."



"Huh? What the hell?"

"Even throughout the history of the Kahn dynasty, only a handful had visited the Demon King's Tomb. Do I have the right to visit the Tomb, I wonder?"

"Ha, I see now. Even if you're not worthy, know that I, the great one, should have the right. After all, I'm the Demon King's successor, recognized by all the geezers at the Instructional School."

The young man grumbled impatiently.

"There you go again with that claim..."

Saladia Kahn, second princess of the Alphas Theocracy, sighed lightly.

Jio Inzagi was the *male elemental* claiming to be the Demon King's successor.

He was the benefactor who had freed Saladia Kahn from her imprisonment by her elder sister.

His combat skills were unmatched by even the royal guard. Fighting valiantly while employing numerous spirits, the way he fought was definitely reminiscent of one who had inherited the Demon King's abilities.

(However...)

His ability to use spirits came from the cursed armament seals carved over his entire body.

One could not consider him a true elemental.

(Although I am very grateful to him for rescuing me...) This self-proclaimed Demon King's successor with delusions of grandeur had his eyes set on the Demon King's Coffin lying dormant in the Tomb.

It was rumored that claiming this legendary artifact, the Demon King's Coffin, would allow one to obtain the Demon King's power.

Presumably, this man only saved Saladia in order to exploit her for her knowledge of the Tomb's location.

(We are simply using each other...)

Murmuring in her thoughts, Saladia Kahn lowered her gaze lightly.

In any case, she must obtain the Demon King's Coffin.

Currently, with her father the king assassinated and her sister dead, she was the only successor to the Kahn dynasty.

However, someone claiming to be the Demon King's reincarnation had suddenly appeared at Mordis.

This man, who had put a stop to the berserk strategic-class spirit Leviathan and defeated Sjora Kahn, not only gained the zealous support of the populace at Mordis but also Zohar as well.

Saladia had no idea who that man was, but she knew this "Demon King" would surely deem her as a hindrance to be killed if he found out that she, the Theocracy's second princess, was still alive.

In order to take the throne, Saladia Kahn must obtain the Demon King's Coffin, to let the people know that she is the Theocracy's legitimate successor.

(Legend has it that the Demon King's Tomb has a powerful guardian.) Although Saladia herself was an outstanding elementalist, she still lacked confidence on her own. At least, her current companion was strong enough to serve as a bodyguard despite being an arrogant and delusional man.

(Indeed, I must get hold of the Coffin at the Demon King's Tomb... The Coffin —) Saladia suddenly felt dizzy.

For some reason, there was a slight sense of dissonance suddenly flashed in her mind.

Why did she desire the Demon King's power so badly?

—Right now, *are these actually my own thoughts?*

"Ooh...!"

Just as she clutched her head, crouching down on the spot...

"Hey princess, I want an answer from you."

Jio Inzagi spoke in a low voice.

"What... is it...?"

*"Are there any spirits in this desert?"*

"...Huh?"

Saladia tilted her head blankly.

"Answer me. Have you heard of spirits here?"

"No, no spirits... are supposed to be, here..."

"Okay, if that's the case, what's that over there?"

Jio Inzagi irritably pointed out into the desert, shimmering like a mirage.

Saladia Kahn looked up.

There, amid the raging sandstorm was *that*.

<—Art thou one who is worthy, here to visit the tomb?> A giant, glowing with blue light, was glaring, looking down at the two of them.



# Chapter 2 - The Missing Princess

## Part 1

The sound of hard combat boots echoed along the passage in the fortress.

"...Hey, that was a misunderstanding just now."

Rubia was walking ahead without speaking a word. Facing her back, Kamito gingerly tried to explain.

"By misunderstanding, what are you referring to?"

Rubia stopped walking and looked back. Her long hair, as crimson as her sister's, fluttered softly.

"Well, umm, what happened just now..."

Kamito wanted to explain briefly about the situation on the bed earlier. However, given how unnatural and easily construed as a perverted scene, how should he explain it—?

Possibly due to spending energy on creating panties, or perhaps acting shy in Rubia's presence, Est had returned to her sacred sword form.

Rubia's ruby-like eyes stared intently at Kamito as though penetrating him.

"I understand. There is no need for an explanation."

"I-I'm glad you understand."

Kamito breathed a sigh of relief.

"I also know that you are a Demon King in all meanings of the term. That being said, making a plaything of your partner, a contracted spirit, is certainly to

be frowned upon."

"Like I said, you've got the wrong idea...!"

Kamito could not help but clutch his head... Just as he thought, there was a complete misunderstanding.

Rubia stared intently at Kamito's face.

"Ren Ashbell. You should tell me you need to use my body whenever you cannot resist the Darkness Elemental Lord's power."

"...!?"

Kamito recalled the scene at the ritual purification site a few days earlier.

Back then, she definitely said something like this. She did not mind if he used her body as he liked when the power of darkness was about to devour him.

Her entire body was marred by cursed armament seals. Recalling the sight of her beautiful naked body, Kamito could not help but turn red.

After going through the passage, the two of them got on a cargo elevator. The elevator's simple design consisted of a processed metal plate with a spirit crystal embedded inside. When Rubia poured in a small amount of divine power, a spirit mechanism could be heard activating while Kamito felt himself surrounded by an uncomfortable floating sensation.

"By the way, what's the emergency meeting about? Did something serious happen in the Ordesia Empire?"

"Clues have been found regarding Saladia Kahn's whereabouts."

Kamito raised his eyebrows slightly.

Saladia Kahn was the second princess and a former general of the Alphas Theocracy. She was also the younger sister of Sjora Kahn, who had merged with Zohar's core and the strategic-class spirit Leviathan and died.

Saladia was initially imprisoned by her older sister, and the goal of Kamito and company was to rescue her and protect her as the princess.

If Saladia were to take the throne, the chaotic situation in the Theocracy arising from Sjora Kahn's rebellion would end, thus eliminating the chance for

intervention by the Ordesia Empire, which had turned into the Holy Kingdom's puppet. In addition, Legitimate Ordesia with Fianna as its empress would win the powerful Dracunia's backing.

However, when Kamito and company first entered the Theocracy's capital of Zohar, Saladia Kahn had escaped, aided by someone unknown.

—Where on earth had she disappeared to?

For the last few days, Rubia's subordinates from the Instructional School were conducting a search, but nothing had turned up yet.

"We shall discuss the specifics later. Walls have ears here."

"...Okay, understood."

Getting off the elevator, they arrived a place offering an overlooking view of the whole city at the foot of the mountain.

This place was the surveillance tower of the Mordis fortress.

Looking down, there was a bizarre sight below.

(...I can't get used to this no matter how many times I look at it.) Frowning, Kamito muttered to himself.

The walls of the mining town Mordis built around the fortress had been invaded by another enormous city. The scene looked like a giant beast was devouring a small animal.

This had happened seventy-two hours earlier.

Aiming to crush the rebel forces gathered at Mordis in one fell swoop, Sjora Kahn, the Theocracy's witch, had activated a strategic-class spirit, Leviathan, that had been sealed and abandoned after a war in the past.

Leviathan was a spirit that would take possession of a city and absorb divine power from the residents. This militarized spirit had possessed the capital of Zohar and gone berserk according to Sjora Kahn's wishes to devastate Mordis.

Although Fianna and others had fortified the city wall's defenses, controlling losses to a minimum, there were still many casualties. From what Kamito had heard, many residents in Zohar had been drained dry of divine power by the



militarized spirit, killing them.

Suddenly, Kamito raised his head and looked to the side.

He saw Rubia close her eyes and quietly bring her hands together.

Kamito had seen Fianna perform the same gesture before.

It was a requiem ritual undertaken by princess maidens of the Divine Ritual Institute.

With her long hair fluttering in the breeze like flames, dressed in a military uniform, she seemed like a noble princess maiden momentarily.

"Time to go."

"Yeah..."

Rubia turned heel and once again ascended the stairs with a determined look on her face.

Kamito hastily followed after her.

## Part 2

As soon as they entered the conference room, Kamito saw the princess lying face down on the table.

"...Oh, Kamito-kun, good morning."

Noticing Kamito, Fianna raised her head and greeted him in a sleepy voice.

"...Yeah, 'morning... By the way, you look very tired."

Fianna was showing faint dark circles under her eyes. Her black hair, usually gorgeous and shining, was messy and filled with split ends as though she did not even have time to brush it.

In front of her was a mountain of open scrolls.

"I have spent the whole night investigating the Demon King Cult's records that were found in Scorpia."

"...You did? It must've been tough."

Kamito praised her. The Demon King Cult's scrolls were not written in the Empire's common language. Instead, they recorded using the Theocracy's Alphaglyphs. It would have been hard to decipher them without Fianna, who had been educated at the Divine Ritual Institute.

"Diving all in seems like a bad idea. Look, aren't you getting dark circles now?"

"...Huh?"

Upon hearing Claire pointing out from the side, Fianna quickly took out a hand mirror. Seeing her own haggard look, she instantly blushed.

"...! I-I allowed Kamito-kun... t-to see me like this...!"

Unlike her days as the scorned Lost Queen, Fianna was currently the monarch of Legitimate Ordesia, raising a banner of rebellion against the Empire. Without knowing it, she must have been pushing herself again and again.

Kamito sat down next to Claire, only to see some fatigue on Claire's face too. Apparently, she had been doing special training with Scarlet till late last night.

Scarlet was a powerful spirit to begin with. After the training at Dragon's Peak, Claire finally unlocked her true form as Ortlinde the Scarlet Valkyrie. As a spirit weapon, whose formidable powers made Restia acknowledge her as a rival, during the battle of Zohar she was even capable of incinerating multiple Nepthenthes Lores instantaneously, an enemy of which a single specimen had given Team Scarlet great trouble during the Blade Dance.

With Ortlinde so powerful, naturally it was a great burden to Claire as the contractor. At the current stage, Claire still had not fully mastered the power. However, once Claire could fully bring out Ortlinde's power and use her elemental waffe with perfect control— (...Perhaps in the near future, she might surpass me in strength.) Recalling a memory of Claire brandishing her whip at upperclassmen at the Academy, Kamito felt strangely emotional.

At that moment—

"Excuse my tardiness. The fortress passages are too complicated and I got lost again."

Dressed in the Sylphid Knights' armor, Ellis arrived with Velsaria. Ellis' face was slightly flushed, probably because she had received notice of the meeting while in the middle of her customary morning training.

The Fahrengart sisters sat down next to each other, opposite to Kamito and others.

"You two were training together today?"

"Yes, I lost two rounds out of three today."

Velsaria nodded.

"Winning twice against Velsaria with a spear?"

Even though Velsaria had few opportunities to exhibit her martial arts, due to using spirits like Silent Fortress that specialized in wide-area damage, Kamito expected her to be Ellis' superior in spear skills.

"Th-That is because my esteemed sister held back—"



"The one who held back would be you. You are now stronger than I am. Be confident in yourself."

"My esteemed sister..."

Ellis looked awestruck. Overjoyed at receiving recognition from the adopted elder sister she had idolized as her goal since childhood, she also felt a little confused.

Indeed, compared to her time at the Academy, Ellis' new strength was on a whole different level.

Growing in leaps and bounds after the training at Dracunia, she had taken out Glasya-Labolas, a strategic-class militarized spirit, with a single strike of her magic spear when they ventured into Zohar.

"I relied on the power of cursed armament seals, but you have surpassed yourself through your own willpower. Be proud of yourself."

Velsaria's expression turned into a smile. Kamito could not help but feel his heart pounding faster, not used to seeing her out of her usual cold expression.

"...Ah, something smells good."

Claire sniffed the air.

"This aroma... Stew?"

Hearing Claire, Ellis turned to the door.

"Good morning, everyone. I bring breakfast that I made."

Dressed in an apron, Rinslet entered pushing a trolley.

The trolley carried deep-fried fish, bacon vegetable soup, fresh perfectly baked bread, butter, and fruit yogurt.

"I can't believe you made so much in such short time..."

Claire could not help but exclaim.

"Our meeting is about to start. Save the meal for later."

Rubia spoke icily at this moment.

"No, Lady Rubia. Our minds will not think properly on an empty stomach."

"..."

Rubia fell silent, unable to refute Rinslet.

Possibly because Rinslet also knew Rubia from the past, Rinslet was apparently someone capable of disrupting her rhythm.

"Is this some kind of fish?"

Seeing fish with a hard shell, Fianna asked with curiosity.



"This is steamed sandfish. I bought it at the market this morning."

It was hard to obtain fresh fish in the Alphas Theocracy which had no sea coast. Despite the "fish" part of the name, sandfish was actually a type of crustacean living in the sand and not real fish.

"...I-Is it really edible?"

Claire frowned with skeptical expression.

"Despite the mild flavor, it is still quite delicious."

"Lemme try..."

Kamito took a bite. *I see, it tastes like whitefish but with the texture of chicken, quite good.*



## Part 3

After the simple breakfast prepared by Rinslet—

"—Saladia Kahn, the Theocracy's second princess, is inside Ghul-a-val."

Rubia opened the discussion in a grave tone of voice.

"Is this accurate?"

Kamito asked.

"This intel was gathered by my trusted subordinates from merchants frequenting Zohar. The second princess apparently escaped the prison aided by someone, then headed east to the desert."

"As expected, someone helped her to escape..."

Kamito and company had guessed that someone had helped Princess Saladia to escape from prison. Although she was a user of demon spirits like her elder sister, breaking out of a heavily guarded prison singlehandedly would probably be out of the question.

(Someone got past the royal guard's defense net and saved her, huh...)  
Kamito frowned mentally. There were not many people capable of escaping with a princess in tow from a prison guarded by what ought to be experienced elementalists.

In addition to elementalist capabilities, skill in covert operations— (For example, someone raised by the Instructional School, that's a possibility—) According to reports from Rubia's subordinates...

Two identified travelers had taken a ride on a merchant ship to travel to the desert in the east. After that, there were sightings of them at several towns along the way, but the trail ended at Kabra, the easternmost town in the Theocracy.

"East of Kabra is Ghul-a-val. The second princess is there."

"..."

Kamito and company silently looked at one another.

Along with the Holy Mountain Londinia and the deepest part of the Spirit Forest, Ghul-a-val was one of the three great terrifying realms of the continent. Even among the people in Ordesia, Ghul-a-val was widely known.

This was a vast desert region on the border of the Alphas Theocracy and the Quina Empire. Ravaged during the Demon King War a thousand years ago, it had turned into a desolate region devoid of blessings from spirits.

"Excuse me, why would Princess Saladia go there?"

At this moment, Rinslet gently raised her hand to inquire.

It was a most natural question. Only someone seeking suicide would go to that kind of place.

"Well, normally speaking, her goal would be to go into exile in the Quina Empire."

With her chin resting on her hand, Claire murmured.

*...I see, that definitely made sense.* If she could secure the Quina Empire to back her, she would be able to clean up the civil war quickly.

However, the Quina Empire was a crafty country. With the Theocracy's princess in their hands, they might use her as a puppet to rule over the entire Theocracy by proxy.

(It's not a good place to go in exile...)

"Saladia Kahn's objective is the Demon King's Tomb hidden in the desert."

Rubia said.

"The Demon King's Tomb?"

Hearing this term for the first time, Kamito frowned.

"Yes, it is where the Demon King's Coffin lies dormant. According to legend, it's the place where Sacred Maiden Areishia vanquished Demon King Solomon."

Saying that, Rubia took out an ancient parchment scroll from her chest pocket.

She spread open the scroll on the table. Something was apparently written in High Ancient on it, but without specialized education, Kamito had no way of reading it.

"Sleeping in the desert tomb, the Demon King's power..."

Capable of reading High Ancient, Fianna murmured intermittently.

"...What is this?"

Kamito asked.

"It was discovered in Scorpia's underground library. Among Sjora Kahn's grimoires, this was the most securely guarded. Most likely, only the royal family had access."

"The Demon King's power—"

Feeling a stir in his heart, Kamito placed a hand on his chest.

"...Isn't that just a legend?"

"Indeed. I would say 80 or 90%—"

Rubia admitted it readily and nodded.

"But it is also true that Saladia Kahn disappeared into Ghul-a-val."

"..."

"Well, let us suppose the legend is true—"

This time, Fianna spoke.

"Why would Princess Saladia seek to obtain the Demon King's power? What is her plan?"

"She probably desires evidence to prove herself as the Theocracy's legitimate successor. Faith in Demon King Solomon continues to run deep in these lands."

"But we were clearly planning to help her..."

"Indeed, but that isn't necessarily how she would view it. I wouldn't be surprised if she saw us as instigating the rebel army, usurpers keen on taking

the Theocracy."

"...By common knowledge, we are wanted criminals in the Ordesia Empire."

Rinslet shrugged slightly and said.

(Seeking the Demon King's legend to prove the legitimacy of her authority, huh...) Feeling something was not right, Kamito ran things through his mind.

Well, it sort of made sense for now.

That being said, did she really have to risk her life in that dangerous desert for the sake of something in a legend?

(Speaking of which, I'm concerned about what the witch said in the end...) Suddenly, Kamito recalled Sjora Kahn's last words when she died together with Leviathan's core.

'—a mere city of this sort does not count as any heavy setback. Accept it as a present for celebrating the revival of the true Demon King.'

She had definitely spoken these words in a withered voice of an old man's.

The revival of the *true* Demon King—

Did that have some connection to the legend of the Demon King's Tomb?

"No matter what, we need to head to Ghul-a-val."

Claire said.

"Indeed. We must secure Saladia Kahn as soon as possible. Even though the situation has settled down, the Theocracy's civil war would intensify eventually. We can't just have this guy keep acting out an impostor Demon King."

"...Totally."

Kamito concurred quietly. To unite the rebels at Mordis, he had put on an act as an impostor Demon King, but he did not want to repeat that kind of performance ever again.

"Why not have Kamito-kun become the real Demon King?"

"Fianna, come on..."

"I think it really suits you, the Demon King's outfit."

Not only Fianna, but even Claire began to talk like this.

...Kamito could remember how the young ladies had to wear indecent clothing. Did they not mind?

"Vivian Melosa has completed arrangements for a ship to the desert. As soon as you are ready, you may proceed to set off for Ghul-a-val any time."

"It would be best to make haste. It would weigh on my conscience if the princess were to perish in the desert."

"Yes, Dracunia's Lord Dragon King also tasked us with securing Lady Saladia's safety."

"There one more reason why time is of the essence."

At this moment, Rubia slowly spoke up.

"...What is it?"

"The Holy Kingdom of Lugia has apparently sent their knights into Ghul-a-val."

"The Holy Kingdom!?"

Kamito and the girls jumped in surprise and looked at one another.

The Holy Kingdom of Lugia.

This nation, dedicated to the holy faith, had been engaging in clandestine operations in other countries while wielding the Otherworldly Darkness that caused the Elemental Lords to go insane.

What was the Holy Kingdom planning? Their objective remained unclear so far.

During the final round of the Blade Dance, they had targeted Restia's life. At the Academy, they attempted to seize Est while she was sealed underground. In Ordesia they had conspired against Fianna. Even in the coup d'etat when Sjora Kahn took the throne, the Holy Kingdom had been pulling strings in the background.

If the Holy Kingdom's knights had appeared in Ghul-a-val, then things were no longer that simple.

(...They even knew about the Demon King's Burial Chamber underground

beneath the Academy.) In that case, it would be hard to dismiss the legend of the Demon King's Tomb as merely a legend.

"Among the knights sent there, Lurie Lizaldia was apparently spotted too."

"...!"

Kamito groaned in the back of his throat.

Lurie Lizaldia was originally one of Ordesia's twelve Numbers.

She was the continent's top healer. At the same time, she was also a fearsome wielder of a demon sword.

Furthermore, she had the same name as Yggdra, the winner of the Blade Dance fifteen years ago.

During the attack on Areishia Spirit Academy, Kamito had regained his memory and defeated her, after that she disappeared— "Is the Holy Kingdom after Princess Saladia?"

Having suffered a near-mortal wound at Lurie's hand previously, Ellis asked nervously.

Rubia shook her head.

"It was a week ago when the knights left the holy capital, so it probably has nothing to do with the princess."

"Then sure enough, it's related to the Demon King's Tomb..."

"..."

Hearing Claire's murmurs, everyone fell silent.

The Tomb where the Demon King's power lay dormant.

Suppose that legend were true—

Were that to fall into the Holy Kingdom's hands, consequences would be irreversible and unthinkable.

"Prepare yourselves for the journey. The ship will be ready at the port in one hour."

Declaring this, Rubia stood up and left the conference room.



## Part 4

Everyone returned to their room to make travel preparations.

That being said, there was not much to pack. At most an amulet for protection against sand and ice spirit crystals for warding off the heat.

Well, Kamito had some experience with desert survival outdoors too. Although it would be quite a trial for the young ladies with their sheltered upbringings, it would be a useful experience.

Just as Kamito was thinking these things and packing food and water into his backpack...

"Kamito, spirit crystals are useless in Ghul-a-val."

A voice from behind.

He looked back to see a girl in a dress the color of night, quietly sitting on the bed.

Her clear eyes, the color of dusk, were staring mischievously at Kamito.

"Restia... What do you mean, useless?"

"Low level spirits, the kind that are sealed in spirit crystals like these, won't be able to obtain enough divine power when in Ghul-a-val, which means they'll disappear."

"I-I see..."

A bit disheartened, Kamito put down the spirit crystals he had taken effort to prepare and placed them on the floor.

It looked like Ghul-a-val was a much harsher place than ordinary deserts.

Just then, Kamito suddenly realized something.

"Could it be that you're very familiar with Ghul-a-val?"

"At least it's not unfamiliar to me, I suppose—"

She tossed her gorgeous lustrous black hair and said.

"After all, I was at the Demon King's capital during the Demon King War a thousand years ago."

"...That's right, now that you mention it."

Even though he had not thought of this during the meeting— Restia had been employed as the Demon King's weapon in the past.

"Maybe you know something about the Demon King's Tomb too?"

"Demon King's Tomb?"

Seeing her look of puzzlement, Kamito told her about the Tomb's legend.

...After listening, Restia went "hmm" and rested her chin on her hand.

"I have heard a little about it. A legend circulating in the Demon King Cult since ancient times. In a city at the far end of the desert, there is a coffin where the Demon King's remains are sealed—"

"The Demon King's remains? That kind of thing—"

It was hard to imagine something like that surviving till now, a thousand years later. However, it was definitely a mystery what had happened to the Demon King after his defeat at the hands of the Sacred Maiden.

Kamito thought of something just then.

Rubia had previously used a taboo spell for calling souls, resurrecting Nepenthes Lore underground of Ragna Ys. Although it was a Demon King "failure" but the terrifying powers of darkness it wielded still gave Team Scarlet a hard time.

(If the Demon King's remains are still in that tomb...) Then it was possible that people would try to resurrect him somehow.

Or perhaps, those remains were precisely the "Demon King's power" recorded in ancient texts?

"In any case..."

Restia plucked a feather and threw it to the ground.

"There is no doubt that the Demon King's capital, destroyed by Sacred Maiden Areishia, is located in Ghul-a-val. Once we go there, perhaps we can clear up the matter of the tomb."

"...Yeah."

Suddenly realizing something, Kamito looked up.

"Say, by the way, do you know the location of the Demon King's capital?"

"Yes. I should be able to offer some pointers if you are fine with the approximate location."

Restia replied nonchalantly.

"Really...!"

Hearing that, Kamito could not help but stand up.

"Oh my, that'll be such a great help. If we had to wander aimlessly in that big desert, it'd be torture."

"Fufu, you could praise me more."

"Amazing, amazing."

"Sheesh, put some effort into it..."

On the bed, Restia crossed her legs the other way and pouted unhappily.

"However, even with knowledge of the location, you're still not guaranteed to reach the Demon King's capital."

"What do you mean?"

"After all, no one has been able to find it for the past thousand years, right? For a city of such prosperity, yet not even any ruins have been found, is that even possible?"

"Then..."

—Indeed, she was right.

No matter how terrible a desert of death, one would expect many fearless adventurers and grave robbers to have attempted to locate the ruins. Then

there was the Demon King Cult that sought the Demon King's revival, surely they must have tried everything to find the location of legend.

However, there had never been any rumors of the city's ruins being found.

"Kamito, do you remember the village where I woke up last time?"

"...The Forest of Ice Blossoms?"

"Yes. Similarly, that forest village eluded discovery, right?"

Located in Laurenfrost territory was the Forest of Ice Blossoms, where the village of an Elfim tribe had kept the amnesiac Restia hidden. The forest had been shrouded in thick mist generated by an ancient magic device, keeping outside invaders out the whole time.

"In other words, the Demon King's capital has a similar barrier, is that it?"

"Highly likely."

It definitely made sense. Going that far would be perfectly logical if someone was going to seal away the Demon King's remains. Or perhaps it was the Demon King himself who had activated this type of barrier magic ahead of time to prevent people from desecrating his remains after his death.

"—If that's the case, we're helpless."

Dispelling a barrier, capable of hiding the site of an entire city, would be no easy task even for Fianna, an expert in barrier magic.

(...Speaking of which, did Saladia Kahn head to the desert because she knew there's a way to lift the barrier?) Otherwise, she probably would not do something so rash— "Restia, any other clues?"

Restia slowly shook her head in response to Kamito's question.

"...Sorry, Kamito. It was a thousand years ago when I was there last. Back then, my self-awareness as a spirit was also sealed away by the Demon King, who used me as just a weapon. Completely unconscious—like during the time when I was sealed in that ring."

"...I see, fair point. Then I'm sorry for asking you so many questions—"

"But perhaps—"

"Yeah?"

Hearing her murmurs, Kamito looked up.

"—By the Demon King's side the whole time, *she* might know something—"

"She?"

"Yes, you remember, right? Demon King Solomon's one and only contracted spirit—"

"Uh... I think so—"

Kamito searched the depths of his memories. It was something he had unintentionally heard while preparing his impostor Demon King costume.

The Demon King only used spirits as tools and had never opened his heart to anyone else, entering a contract with only one spirit— "Where is that spirit now?"

Kamito asked.

"I don't know."

Restia shook her head.

"But according to an old legend—"

As though staring off into the distance, she spoke softly.

"And so it goes, she disappeared somewhere in Astral Zero after the Demon King's death."

## Part 5

Inside an office set up in the fortress, Fianna was struggling through a mountain of mail sent from various countries.

As the monarch of the independent state of Legitimate Ordesia, she had to reply to various diplomatic correspondence before setting off on her journey.

"Looks like the imperial council finally decided to break diplomatic ties with Dracunia."

She sighed while writing replies to various lords and nobles who had written to express their support for Legitimate Ordesia.

Her foolish brother was not the one behind the council's decision.

The current imperial council had fallen to being a puppet of the Holy Kingdom of Lugia.

(What is the Holy Kingdom's goal...?)

All she could conclude was that the Kingdom was trying to use Ordesia to set the the continent ablaze with war.

However, why did the Kingdom need to do that?

(...Regardless, my brother definitely won't leave us alone.) Currently, reactions were mixed among the other countries regarding Legitimate Ordesia. Though ignored when first established in exile, after establishing an alliance with Dracunia's Dragon King and putting an end to the Theocracy's atrocities, Legitimate Ordesia's profile had increased with each passing day.

One after another, the nations of the continent condemned Sjora Kahn for using Leviathan, a strategic-class militarized spirit. At the same time, they also criticized Ordesia for opposing military intervention in the Theocracy this whole time.



(Right now, no matter what, we must do everything we can to win over Princess Saladia to our side—) Just as she slipped into deep thought, there was knocking at the office's door.

"Your Highness, I prepared tea."

"Thank you. Perfect timing for a break."

Ellis pushed the door open and entered, bringing teacups for two.

Ellis had been appointed secretary and bodyguard duties. After all, she was topnotch as a bodyguard while her serious and reliable qualities made her very suitable as a secretary too.

As soon as Ellis put down a teacup on the table, Fianna could smell the rich aroma of milk tea.

She took a sip and exhaled with pleasure.

"Sweet and delicious. My fatigue is swept away."

"I tried adding some honey and sugar, though Rinslet considers that heretical —"

Saying that, Ellis took a glance at the document that Fianna had just signed.

"This emblem... Is it from the Quina Empire?"

"Just a personal letter. It's not official diplomatic correspondence."

"A letter?"

"This is the sender."

Fianna showed the name of the sender to Ellis.

"Linfa Sin Quina... A letter personally written by Princess Linfa!?"

Ellis was slightly shocked.

Team Scarlet had encountered Princess Linfa during the Blade Dance tournament where she was the princess maiden of the formidable team Four Gods. Her divine beast spirit Kirin produced barriers rivaling that of Fianna's elemental waffe.

Team Scarlet and the Four Gods had fought together against Sjora Kahn. After

the first round, they had celebrated a victory party together, but— "Princess Linfa expresses her support for Legitimate Ordesia. She says she is preparing to send an emissary soon."

"Quina supports Legitimate Ordesia?"

Seeing Ellis widen her brown eyes, Fianna shook her head with a wry smile.

"No, the Quina Empire has yet to recognize us. This document is just a personal letter from Princess Linfa. She has many considerations of her own, I suppose."

"I recall that Her Highness Linfa is the third princess. What a complicated position."

In a different way, the great nation of Quina in the east was just as dangerous as the Holy Kingdom. While watching from the side as Ordesia gradually turned into the Holy Kingdom's puppet, Quina had its eyes set on dominating the continent. They seemed to be maintaining their wait-and-see policy of diplomacy for now in regards to Legitimate Ordesia.

Under such circumstances, it was quite encouraging to know that they had forged friendship with a former rival at the Blade Dance.

"There are also many lords within Ordesia who express their support for us."

"House Alfreed of the Golden Islands, House Bolmist who serves as the Laurenfrost's flag-bearer, and House Daria of Black Bay... None of the great houses, but at least it gives us some confidence."

"Currently, there is practically no one in the palace who feels loyal to my brother. If our supporters continue to increase, retaking Ordesia will no longer be a dream..."

Fianna tidied up the letters she had finished and handed them to Ellis.

Looking at the pile of letters in her hands, Ellis bit her lip hard.

"What of House Fahrengart, Your Highness?"

"..."

Fianna quietly shook her head.

"...I see."

The Dukedom of Fahrengart was a knightly house pledged to absolute loyalty towards the Emperor of Ordesia.

Even if the monarch were incompetent, they would probably still uphold loyalty to the very end.

"...Sorry, Ellis."

"Your Highness, there is no need for you to apologize."

When Fianna bowed her head lightly and spoke softly, Ellis asserted with determination.

"My esteemed sister and I have prepared ourselves. As knights, we make our decision without regret."

"...Thank you."

Having heard Ellis' thoughts from the heart, Fianna quietly bowed her head.

## Part 6

Exactly an hour went by after the morning meeting.

Kamito and his teammates gathered at the port in the eastern part of Mordis.

Although called a port, Mordis was a town in the middle of the desert after all. Naturally, there was no sea around.

When ports in the desert were mentioned, they normally referred to where "sand ships" were moored.

"So this is a sand ship that I've heard about—"

Carrying heavy luggage on his back, Kamito looked up at a ship half sunk in the sand and muttered.

This was no military vessel but a merchant ship used for trading across the desert, not particular large. Although no weaponry was installed, it was supposed to be quite impressive in speed.

"Unfortunately, the Revenant cannot be used—"

Holding down her bangs that were blowing in the wind, Rubia commented.

The Revenant, the military ship used by the League of Inferno, was currently undergoing maintenance at a Mordis dock. Although flying was not impossible, it was not possible to guarantee a secure supply of spirit power in Ghul-a-val and the drive reactor's spirit mechanism could malfunction, risking a crash.

On the other hand, the sand ships used in the Theocracy were able to follow leylines that were hidden deep underground, allowing them to sail through the desert without difficulty. However, their only drawback was that they could not head to anywhere that was not connected by leylines, thus they could only move along simple routes.

"This is my first time on a sand ship."

"Me too. It is bigger than I had imagined."

Claire and Rinslet were looking at the ship with wonder.

Their luggage was packed very full.

"...Rinslet, what do you have in there?"

"Snacks, obviously. See, Claire, your favorite canned peaches are inside too."

"Eh, you're serious♪"

Claire's twintails jumped adorably.

"You two, we are not going on a trip for fun."

Seeing the Claire and Rinslet acting like that, Ellis warned.

"Fianna, that's all the luggage you're carrying?"

Seeing Fianna traveling light with just a shoulder bag, Kamito asked her.

"Yes, I am keeping the rest inside Georgios."

Fianna winked and drew near to Kamito's ear to whisper.

"Fufu, Kamito-kun, I've also prepared all kinds of erotic underwear to use at night."

"...! G-Give me a break...!"

Kamito was a healthy male, after all.

...Unable to stop himself from imagining what kind of underwear for a moment, he instantly went red.

"Okay, let's hurry!"

Picking up their luggage, Claire and the girls immediately made their way into the ship.

"Oh my..."

Seeing that, Kamito shrugged and turned around to look at Rubia.

"I'm leaving the rest here to you. Will you be okay?"

"Yes. Velsaria and I shall do our best until your team returns."

Although Sjora Kahn was defeated, the civil war in the Theocracy was still highly volatile. If the absence of Princess Saladia continued, the situation would only grow more chaotic.

"I'm leaving Muir and Lily to you too—"

"No need to say anymore. They are my precious subordinates."

Rubia replied coldly.

Muir Alenstahl and Lily had been discovered near Leviathan. Depleted of divine power to an almost life threatening degree, they were still comatose.

But fortunately, they were in no danger of dying, thanks to Muir subconsciously activating her special ability, the Jester's Vise, back when Leviathan was devouring them. Afraid of this power, capable of rendering spirits insane, Leviathan had given up on absorbing the two of them.

(...Subordinates, huh? She still insists on this word when she's painstakingly taking care of them.) Faced with Rubia's air of nonchalance, Kamito laughed wryly in his thoughts.

Lily aside, the reason why Rubia paid extra care to Muir Alenstahl was probably because Muir reminded Rubia of Claire in certain ways.

"Then I'll be going—"

Picking up his luggage, Kamito started to walk— "..."





"Huh?"

Feeling as though someone behind him wanted to speak, Kamito looked back.

"What's the matter?"

"...Nothing."

Confronted with his question, Rubia looked hesitant.

(...What's going on?)

To think that she would be indecisive at times.

Surprised, Kamito frowned. At that moment— "...Ren Ashbell."

As though committing her resolve, she drew her face close to Kamito's.

Then—

*"I entrust my little sister to you."*

Those were the words she quietly spoke to him.

## Part 7

"Hey, do not retreat! Faltering will be a taint to honor of the glorious Knights of Saint Lugia!"

"B-But Lady Ineza, this spirit—gahhhhhh!"

A knight in elemental waffe armor was struck by a massive hammer, sending her flying spectacularly.

Falling headfirst into a sand dune, she stopped moving.

"...! Damn it, I can't believe... the best of the knights... all wiped out...?"

The knight dressed in vestments of red on a white background, Ineza Sandra, groaned. She was the commander of this expeditionary force.

All over this land of red sand were fallen knights of the Holy Kingdom. Any of them would be an elite templar knight heaped with respect and accolades back in their country.

Such an elite force of knights, yet they were no match at all here.

Looking down on the knights was a giant humanoid spirit with a head shaped like a crocodile's.

The spirit featured muscular limbs and eyes glowing red. Held in its hand was a giant hammer glowing with golden light.

Against a single spirit—

Tasked with finding the Tomb, the Knights of Saint Lugia were crushed, unable to put up any resistance.

This was a nightmare.

<—Art thou one who is worthy?>

The spirit's voice echoed all around, carried by the desert's dry wind.

Faced with the spirit asking *for the third time*— "...! What do you mean by worthy!? What the hell do you want!?"

Ineza shouted back in a rage.

The spirit stared at her with completely emotionless eyes.

<—Thou art unworthy of stepping foot into the Demon King's land. Leave now.> A gale howled as the spirit swung the hammer at Ineza.

She frantically raised her elemental waffe, a holy spear, intending to block— In that very instant before the hammer swung down...

A small figure rushed out in front of her.

"You would do best to value your own life more, Captain."

"...!"

A black-haired woman had blocked the spirit's hammer.

Instead of the holy vestments of the Saint Lugia Knights, she was wearing a healer's white robe.

The woman slightly lifted the small set of glasses perched on her nose and spoke.

"The Sphinx of the Demon King's Tomb is clearly beyond your ability."

"...! Dame Lurie—!"

Ineza angrily shouted the name of the woman who had saved her.

Military healer, Lurie Lizaldia—Former eighth of the Ordesian Empire's Numbers.

Especially adept in healing spells of spirit magic, she held the rank of "Holy Maiden."

Having betrayed her home country of Ordesia, she was now serving the Holy Kingdom of Lugia's Cardinal Millennia Sanctus as a guest general.

Earlier, Ineza had clearly ordered her to stand by in the sand dragon ship— "Stand down, Dame Lurie. You are getting in the way of battle."

Making no effort to hide her scorn, Ineza spoke. In her eyes, this woman, who

had betrayed her own country as one of Ordesia's Numbers, was completely untrustworthy.

Even though Lurie was Millennia's trusted subordinate, Ineza considered herself higher in rank, as the commander of this expeditionary force at least.

"There's no way I can just stand back. At this rate, you really are going to be wiped out."

Lurie shook her head, easily pushing aside the hammer with her demon sword.

The spirit hovered in the air, looking down at the new enemy. Then— <— Thou art unworthy of stepping foot into the Demon King's land. Leave now.> It repeated exactly what it had just said.

"Sorry, no can do."

Lurie shrugged and smiled ironically.

"After all, my master wishes to obtain what is inside the Tomb—"

<—Unworthy one, leave now!>

The spirit's eyes glowed red and a high-temperature beam shot out from the jewel on its forehead.

Within the blink of an eye, the spot where Lurie had been standing was surrounded by blazing flames.

"—Oh my, what a pain."

However, Lurie was no longer there.

With a flash of the sword, she swung her demon sword fluidly in midair. Completely incongruent with her rank of Holy Maiden, the demon sword was shrouded in ominous miasma.

"O king of soul-devouring demon swords, slaughter the enemy before me— Bloody Strike!"

The blood-colored blade glowed crimson—

Lurie Lizaldia's demon sword instantly sent the hammer flying together with the amputated arm holding it.

The severed arm rolled in the air while gradually turning into particles of light and disappearing.

However, the spirit made no change in expression and repeated itself.

<—Thou art unworthy of stepping foot into the Demon King's land. Leave now... Leave now... Leave now...> The spirit's massive body gradually disappeared into the blowing sand and dust.

Lurie stabbed the demon sword into the ground by her foot.

There was not even a single drop of sweat on her forehead.

Ineza Sandra could not help but feel terrified.

It was hard to imagine this to be the power of a Holy Maiden specialized in the art of healing.

Lurie turned her head towards Ineza.

"That Sphinx is something like a hallucination generated by the Demon King's power. A guardian for selecting visitors to enter the Tomb. Sure enough, failing to obtain the Demon Slayer in Ordesia has serious consequences. If only I had that sacred sword, I'd be recognized as worthy, I suppose—"

"Dame Lurie..."

Ineza gulped and spoke.

"At this rate, the glorious Saint Lugia Knights will face total annihilation at the hands of these *spirits*. You should retreat and contact the Kingdom."

Seven days had passed since this company of paladins were sent to Ghul-a-val.

Initially optimistic regarding this search mission for the Demon King's Tomb, they had encountered resistance from powerful archdemon-class spirits like the Sphinx just now.

Of course, these knights were the Holy Kingdom's elite and had previously completed quests to eliminate archdemon-class spirits in the past. In fact, they had defeated multiple instances of these guardian spirits.

However, the spirit kept reappearing no matter how many times they

defeated it, attacking without regard for night or day.

This company, with fully twelve spirit knights, was reaching the brink of collapse.

"Indeed, the Tomb's Sphinx is quite a pain."

Lurie used a finger to lift her glasses.

Kneeling next to injured knights, she used spirit magic to heal them one after another.

"But retreat is not an option. Des Esseintes' orders are absolute."

"...! Are you telling us to face total annihilation just like that!?"

Confronted with the captain's emotional outburst, Lurie shook her head.

"I have already taken action and requested reinforcements from the Kingdom."

"Requested reinforcements?"

"Dame Millennia and Luminaris' Sacred Spirit Knights are heading here."

"Did you say the Sacred Spirit Knights?"

Ineza raised her eyebrows.

Indeed, Luminaris Saint Leisched hailed from a prestigious family at the city of Alexandria. Having fought her way to the Blade Dance finals before, she was the Holy Kingdom's most honored knight.

However, even if she brought her subordinates along as reinforcements, they would still be helpless against the infinitely spawning Sphinx spirits.

"Luminaris will bring *that* along. A chance for a field test too."

"...*That*?"

"Yes, if we blow away this entire desert, the troublesome guardians will all disappear, right?"

While healing the injured knights, Lurie smiled coldly.



# Chapter 3 - The Desert of Red Death, Ghul-a-val

## Part 1

It was daytime on the second day after Kamito and company set off from the fortress city Mordis.

On the sea of the endless desert, a small ship was currently sailing across the sand.

Designed to follow leylines, sand ships suffered from the limitation that they could not decide their course freely. However, compared to flying ships, there was the advantage that the helmsman was less strained.

"Quite an old and worn ship... Can this really move across the desert?"

Although Claire had her concerns, this ship had apparently been remodeled by Vivian Melosa. The interior was unexpectedly reassuring.

In emergency situations, the ship could even switch its power source. From what Kamito had heard, a military spirit mechanism had been installed. This contraband item was something that Rubia had obtained through her connections with Murders.

(Great, so now that we've finally entered Ghul-a-val—) On the deck, Kamito kept wiping the nonstop sweat from his forehead.

Forsaken by the power of spirits, this was a blood-red and desolate desert.

Was there really some kind of Demon King's Tomb in this place?

"...Hmm, by the way, it's so hot~..."

Leaning against a railing on the ship's edge, Claire spoke with exhaustion.

Even a flame elementalist like her would still feel the heat in hot places.

Having unbuttoned her uniform collar that was drenched with sweat, she kept fanning herself with her hands.

...For a while now, Kamito had been catching tantalizing glimpses of the front of her chest, a rather dangerous situation indeed.

"...!"

Kamito hastily looked away.

Only to see before his eyes—

Someone was lying on the floor like a beached mermaid.

Rinslet.

"...Ughhh, so hot~... I am going to die from the heat~"

She was rolling on the deck, completely ignoring the fact that she was the noble daughter of a duke.

It was also heart-wrenching to see the damage in her long shining platinum blonde hair.

...This scorching desert was too harsh for a young lady hailing from snow country.

"Rinslet, are you okay? Maybe you should rest in bed?"

When Kamito asked her, she replied:

"No, Kamito. Thank you very much for your concern, but I respectfully decline. Compared to the rest of the ship, this place is best."

"Well, I guess you're right..."

In fact, the ship's interior was even hotter than the deck that was exposed to sunlight. The spirit mechanism kept releasing great amounts of heat after absorbing power from the leylines.

As a military ship, the Revenant did feature cooling systems, but this sand ship

had nothing of that sort. Naturally, there were no bathing facilities for ritual purification either.

"Summon Fenrir. At least it'll be a bit cooler."

All covered in sweat, Claire suggested.

"Fenrir is a spirit born in Niflheim, the coldest extremes of Astral Zero. Summoning him in a place like this would be too cruel."

Rinslet refused weakly.

(...What a kind and gentle young lady.)

Kamito could not help but exclaim in his heart. The reason why Rinslet was so loved and welcomed by the maids and residents of Laurenfrost and the spirits at the Academy was probably thanks to this kind personality of hers.

"You have a point... Wait, Scarlet, go back to Astral Zero."

Hearing Claire's command, the flaming hell cat meowed and shook her head. It looked like Scarlet enjoyed the scorching desert.

Although the flames on Scarlet's body were nowhere near as hot as real flames, it still contributed to visual suffering.

"You two, please endure this heat."

At this moment, Fianna's voice was heard coming from somewhere.

"...?"

Kamito and company looked around—

Only to see the knight spirit Georgios sitting on a large wooden crate.

The knight spirit's head portion opened with a clang to reveal Fianna poking her head out.

"I can't believe you ran off to a place like that...!"

"Fufu, the interior of this armor is isolated from the outside world. So cool and refreshing."

"If I remember correctly, isn't the inside of Georgios connected to Astral Zero?"

"The Gate to Astral Zero is currently closed, so it is fine for me to enter here."

*...I see. Now that is well thought out.*

"Your Highness, this is so unfair!"

"L-Let me inside too!"

Together, Claire and Rinslet kept hammering Georgios' armor.

"My condolences, but Georgios is a royal spirit exclusive to the imperial family."

After speaking nonchalantly, Fianna closed the helmet with a clang.

"Stingy princess!"

"The greatest tyrant in all of Ordesia's history!"

The two girls hammered the armor with anger and hatred, but the knight spirit's armor remained completely unmoved.

"You two, doing this will only make you hotter."

"T-True, sigh..."

"I am at my limit~"

The two girls collapsed in exhaustion on the deck once more.

At that moment—

"My goodness, to succumb to this level of heat, you really lack training."

A gust of cool wind blew past Kamito and company.

Ellis jumped down with Ray Hawk in hand.

She had apparently been doing spear training on top of the cabin until just now. Her bangs were wet from sweat.

Her uniform also turned partially transparent, revealing the lines of her underwear beneath— "...!"

However, pointing this out would be embarrassing, so Kamito had no choice but to silently avert his gaze.

"I cannot believe you are still training in such hot weather."



"After all, I was born with Wind's Blessing."

"I am so jealous..."

"Well, it will become cool again at night."

"More than cool, the nights are chilly... Sigh."

Muttering, Claire looked out at Ghul-a-val, red as far as the eye could see.

"By the way, Kamito."

"W-What?"

Seeing Claire stare at him for some reason, Kamito panicked a little.

"What did you talk to my sister about before boarding the ship?"

"O-Oh... Umm, all kinds of stuff..."

Kamito looked away, trying to dodge the issue.

(It's not really for me to reveal...)

Rubia should be the one to convey her own words.

"Hmph, what the heck. You're acting weird..."

Seeing Kamito's attitude, Claire cast a displeased look of suspicion.

## Part 2

In a field of dreams, as white as snow—

Est woke up.

(...That dream... again—)

She coldly murmured to herself in her thoughts.

Despite waking up, she was unable to move her body freely.

Her consciousness was sealed inside a sacred sword, embedded in a rock, inside a certain temple.

During the war in Astral Zero several thousand years ago— Previously employed as the ultimate spirit weapon, on the very day when the world had split into Astral Zero and the human realm, she had fallen onto this continent.

A spirit that no one had been able to use no matter how many tried.

A sword impossible to pull out no matter what.

This was the sword spirit—Terminus Est.

Although her strength was far weaker than when she was in Astral Zero, she was still far too powerful for humans.

Hence, the sword did not fall into anyone's hands, spending eternity in this tiny temple merely as an object of reverence.

*—That was supposed to be the case.*

After Est landed on the ground, two thousand years passed.

One day, a girl who had ascended the mountain to collect firewood arrived at the temple.

Dressed in a woolen outfit of pure white, the girl had an adorable face.

She had most likely lost her way and accidentally got there.

Completely unaware that the strongest spirit was sealed there, the girl—  
Casually drew her out.

Till now, countless people had attempted to take possession of her.

Some sought fame, others sought the power to save the world.

However, the girl was different from all the humans who had previously  
come.

What the girl sought was not the sacred sword's power— Only *a desire for a friend*—That was her wish.

(...No... Don't, if you contract with me, you will—!) In the pure white dream,  
Est's consciousness cried out.

However, her voice did not take form—



## Part 3

Carrying Kamito and team, the sand ship continued to advance across the boiling desert.

The sun was setting, producing long shadows on the deck. However, there was not an oasis in sight no matter where they went in this sea of red sand.

"At this rate, it looks like today will be fruitless too..."

Leaning against the railing on deck, Kamito sighed.

"Did Princess Saladia really come here?"

"Who knows? We might even have overtaken her—"

"Well, that's not impossible."

Claire shrugged.

"If only we had more clues—"

Muttering, Kamito took his hand off the railing.

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, to check out Est."

"Hmph... You're doting on Est as usual."

"I guess."

After replying and patting off the abundant sand stuck to his uniform, Kamito walked towards the cabin.

Two days earlier, Est had had a dream about the past.

Ever since, she started showing mysterious facial expressions of unease.

At first glance, they resembled her usual expressionless face. However, Kamito noticed subtle changes in his partner's expressions.

Back to the cabin, he opened the door— He noticed a small bulge in his bed. From a corner of his sheets, he could see messy silver hair poking out.

"What's wrong, Est?"

It was rather common for Est to slip into Kamito's bed.

Wait a sec, for that to be common would be a problem in itself...

Kamito approached his bed and gently lifted the sheets.

"...Est?"

"Kami... to..."

He saw the sword spirit, completely naked except for a pair of kneesocks, staring at him with a dazed look— In the next instant, she spread her slender arms and hugged him tightly.

Kamito instantly understood that this was not her usual behavior when she simply wanted to be pampered.

She must have dreamt another unsettling dream.

Furthermore, this was not the only difference from usual.

"E-Est, what is going on!?"

Kamito could not help but exclaim in surprise.

Instead of her usual black kneesocks, she was wearing multi-colored striped kneesocks instead.

"...!"

In response, Est widened her violet eyes and started to create new black kneesocks frantically.

"I have disgraced myself in front of you."

"Not exactly, I really don't get your hangups..."

Clearly, striped kneesocks were quite cute too— ...Putting that aside, nothing like this had happened before.

...This implied how unsettled she was.

"Est, are you okay? Did you dream about the past again?"

"—Cannot remember."

"I see..."

—Kamito had some idea.

(Est's past memories awakening has happened before...) It was the night before the first round of the Blade Dance tournament. In order to erase the cursed brand that Rubia had cast, Est had used her power as a sacred sword to the limit.

Although only temporarily, her spirit contract with Kamito had been interrupted. Memories of the genuine Demon Slayer—Est's main body located somewhere in Astral Zero—had awakened as a result.

Perhaps similar to last time, Est's current dreams were the result of the real Terminus Est's memories flowing to her here.

In that case—

Kamito's gaze fell upon the sword spirit seal branded on his right hand.

(...Could it be that Est's spirit contract is about to return to normal?) In fact, the contract between Kamito and Est was quite incomplete. The current Demon Slayer was capable of mustering at most one tenth of the original Est's power.

Could it be that the original power was about to return to Est?

Est clutched Kamito's clothing tightly.

"Kamito, I am so afraid."

Her shining long silver-white hair shook, looking as though it might disappear any moment.

"Every time I see that dream, I feel like I am no longer me—"

"Est..."

Seeing the sword spirit like that, Kamito gently stroked her head.

"To me, Est is only you. Only you are Est."

"Kamito—"

Est raised her head forcefully, her violet eyes blinking.

—At that very moment...

Booooooooooom...!

Suddenly, the ship shook violently with a rumbling noise like an earthquake.

"...! W-What's going on!?"

## Part 4

Rushing to the deck, Kamito was stunned by the scene before his eyes.

A gigantic vortex in the desert was about to drag the sand ship into it.

"...Hey, what the heck is that?"

Leaning over the railing, Kamito shouted.

"I-I don't know either!"

"Suddenly, it appeared in front of the ship's course!"

On the heavily tilted deck, the young ladies were evidently in panic too.

"A maelstrom...!"

"Maelstrom?"

Hearing Fianna, who was using all her strength to steer the ship, Kamito asked.

"It is a kind of vortex produced when a leyline's flow is disrupted. Normally, it only appears out at sea—"

Creaaaaak—With the sound of compression, the ship tilted even more.

"Kyahhh!"

"Owa!"

Seeing Claire lose her balance and roll on the deck nonstop, Kamito hastily caught her in his arms.

"There... now, are you okay?"

"...Y-Yes... T-Thank you."

Blushing, Claire nodded.

"...! No good! The ship is being pulled over there!"

Although Fianna kept pouring divine power into the spirit crystal embedded in the helm, the ship's course remained unchanged. Not only that, but the ship kept getting drawn towards the center of the vortex.

For starters, this was a ship that derived energy from the divine power flowing in leylines. Relying on divine power poured in by a princess maiden would not be enough to control the ship.

"At this rate, the ship will crack—"

Claire said with anxiety on her face.

"Ellis, can you use wind spirit magic to levitate the entire ship?"

"...No, levitating such a large ship would be too hard."

Ellis shook her head. Even so, she still used Ray Hawk to control the wind, doing as much as she could to counter the ship's tilt.

"Look! There is something in the center of the vortex!"

Fianna shouted loudly. Kamito focused his eyes and looked into the depths of the sandstorm.

In the center of the vortex, he could see an object resembling a giant pair of scissors.

The pair of scissors was opening and closing as though waiting for Kamito's ship.

"Is that... a spirit? No wait, is it a magic beast...?"

"—It is the antlion, commonly known as the Ship Breaker."

At this moment, the Vorpall Sword at Kamito's waist spoke out.

"Restia, you need to tell me earlier if you know things like that!"

"After all, I didn't expect a monster from a thousand years ago to still live in these parts."

Kamito had a feeling that Restia was mentally sticking her tongue out despite her demon sword form.

"G-Give a break~..."

"If those giant jaws catch us, this ship will be crushed easily."

"Yeah, I can imagine that—"

Kamito scratched his head then stood on the prow.

"Kamito, what are you going to do?"

Seeing that, Claire asked him.

"Anyway, I've got to defeat that monster first—"

"Got it. We'll cover you."

Picking up her flaming whip, Claire nodded. Ellis and Rinslet also deployed their respective elemental waffen.

In this area, they had already developed tacit understanding.

Chanting flight magic, Ellis formed a vortex of wind around Kamito.

"Let's go, Restia."

"Fufu, leave it to me—"

The demon sword of darkness erupted with jet-black lightning.

Wielding the Vorpall Sword, Kamito flew towards the vortex in the sand.

# Chapter 4 - The Sphinx of the Tomb

## Part 1

"...Sheesh. No wonder this is called the Desert of Red Death."

"My goodness, Lady Rubia. She should have told us ahead of time."

"Don't blame my sister. Nee-sama might not know this kind of monster was living here."

Listening to Fianna grumbling while brushing off the sand stuck to her hair, Claire shrugged and replied.

After sundown, in the desert at night—

Kamito and company were sitting on the sand, looking up at the starry night sky.

Swallowed by the desert vortex, the ship had a huge crack, almost turning it into wreckage.

The exposed drive reactor's spirit crystal glowed with pale white phosphorescence, faintly illuminating the surroundings.

...This only happened because Kamito screwed up—Not.

While Rinslet was using Freezing Arrow to seal the monster's movements, Kamito had executed a special move from the Absolute Blade Arts, spectacularly defeating the giant jawed beast in one hit.

...However, what happened next was unexpected.

In the desert vortex, unbelievably, there were dozens of Antlions with even



bigger jaws.

"Who could have thought that the center of the vortex was the beast's lair. Even I failed to discern that with my very own eyes."

"Yes, no one could have expected so many monstrous beasts like these to be gathered together, normally speaking..."

Seeing one of their own defeated, the enraged swarm of beasts crushed the sand ship with their jaws.

In the nick of time, Kamito and company escaped the ship and successfully defeated the beasts, but ended up stranded in the middle of the desert with no choice but to camp outside.

A survey of the surroundings revealed a graveyard of many sand ships buried in the sand apart from the one Kamito's team was riding. Most likely, numerous merchant ships heading into Ghul-a-val had been swept into that monster's lair after losing contact.

"...The sun has completely set."

"The driver reactor's spirit crystals are intact. Can't the ship be repaired?"

Claire asked.

"That would be far too difficult."

Glancing at the ship's broken remains, Ellis shook her head.

Even for Ellis, whose expertise in carpentry had allowed her to build a home for Kamito in three hours, with the aid of Simorgh's powers, repairing the ship here would be impossible.

"Looks like we have to camp here tonight."

"Yeah..."

Advancing through the desert blindly without any sense of direction would be tantamount to suicide. Having been dropped off in the wilderness during his Instructional School days, Kamito had poignant memories of such experiences.

Fortunately, the majority of their luggage had been given to Fianna to keep inside the alternate dimension inside Georgios and was thus safe. Had they lost

their food and water too, everyone would most likely perish here, with the desert as their grave.

"O flames, dance—"

Claire ignited some broken timber embedded in the sand to serve as illumination.

"O eternal wind, grant us peace—Air Wall."

Ellis recited an incantation, using a wall of wind to cover the vicinity of their camp.

"What a disaster. I hope Princess Saladia is safe—"

Fianna sighed and murmured.

Indeed, there was no guarantee that Saladia Kahn could remain safe in this desert where monstrous beasts lurked. Even though the princess was reputedly a powerful elementalist herself, one would not expect her to last long defending against wave after wave of attacks from beasts.

"I heard Princess Saladia has a bodyguard."

"Yes, according to rumors, someone apparently took care of the Theocracy's royal guard."

Ellis nodded.

"Must be quite an amazing guy—"

Suddenly, Kamito looked at the ground by his feet, only to see the sand bulging slightly.

"...Hmm?"

Kamito deftly inserted his hand into the sand and grabbed the wriggling object under the sand.

He held it up for a look, only to see a sand-colored creature with large mandibles, resembling a lobster.

"What? Is this a young version of the Antlion just now?"

"Kamito, this is a sand scorpion."

Eyes brightening up, Rinslet stood up.

"Don't tell me, it's edible?"

"...The red color creeps me out. I'd rather not."

Making a subtle expression, Claire commented.

"Although there is some paralyzing poison, if you cut off the tail and drain out the poison, it will be fine."

"Really...?"

"Just leave it to me—Come, Fenrir!"

At the snap of Rinslet's fingers, a demon ice spirit appeared out of thin air, surrounded by a blizzard. From his mouth that was connected to Astral Zero, kitchenware kept emerging one after another.

Particularly striking was a deep pot with metallic luster.

"What are you planning to make?"

Seeing that, Ellis asked.

"Special curry made with sand scorpions."

"Curry? What is that?"

"I suppose it is not common home cooking in Ordesia, after all. Curry first originated in the Balstan Kingdom but nowadays, it is more famous as food cooked by the Divine Ritual Institute's princess maidens."

"This was made by the Queen serving the Earth Elemental Lord, for princess maidens undergoing strict training. Not only does it nourish and strengthen the body, but also replenishes divine power. In the Divine Ritual Institute, they serve curry once every week."

Fianna, who used to live at the Divine Ritual Institute, raised an index finger and explained to the group.

"I see. Then I look forward to it."

"First, I need to cook some spices to make a roux. Claire, ready Miss Hell Cat spirit."

"Sheesh, Scarlet isn't a stove, okay?"

Despite complaining, Claire still summoned her hell cat spirit.

Crouching in a small ditch in the sand, Scarlet curled up into a ball. After putting the pot on Scarlet's back, Rinslet rhythmically added powdered herbs and spices into the pot one after another.

Soon after the pot was lidded, boiling sounds could be heard.

Everyone sat around the flames enveloping Scarlet, waiting to the curry to be done.

"...In any case, going after the Demon King's Tomb right now would be the worst idea."

Claire sighed and murmured to herself.

She was right. Now that they had lost the ship, their only choice was to retreat to a town with an oasis.

"Where in Ghul-a-val are we?"

"No idea. Spirit crystals for identifying direction do not work here."

"We should be approaching the central region of the desert, but we cannot even find a single sign of ruins."

"Besids, we do not even know what the Demon King's Tomb looks like."

Ellis and Rinslet shrugged together.

"...I really wanna find a place to purify myself. Too much dirt and the circulation of divine power gets affected."

Claire looked down at her uniform, all covered in sand. Indeed, putting aside Kamito, a boy, not being able to take a bath would be a matter of life and death for these young ladies of nobility.

"Are we going to find an oasis?"

"I do not think it will be so easy to stumble upon one. After all, this is the Desert of Red Death, forsaken by the spirits—"

"Fair enough."

"..."

At that moment—

Fianna, who had been lost in deep thought with her head down, saying not a word, suddenly lifted her head.

"Say, who wants to try a sand bath?"

"A sand bath?"

Claire and the rest of the girls raised their eyebrows with surprise on their faces.

"Yes, did you know that sand that has been purified by sunlight is as clean as pure water?"

"I-Is that true?"

"I have never heard of this."

"There is always a first time for everything, come—"

Confronted with questions from Claire and the others, Fianna nodded and replied with a confident look.

## Part 2

With his view completely dark—

"...H-Hey, are you done yet?"

Kamito timidly asked.

"N-Not yet!"

"Certainly not!"

However, all he could get were answers of this sort.

"To be honest, this posture is quite uncomfortable..."

The *blindfolded* Kamito tried to turn his body.

However, the sand weighing upon him did not budge the slightest.

Well, he could squirm his way out if he really wanted to escape— But in that case, he would have to prepare himself to suffer attacks from Claire and all the girls.

"..."

...He could hear what sounded like alluring rustling of clothing.

Could it be that they happened to be removing their underwear...?

(...By the way, this looks really bad from all kinds of perspectives.) Kamito sighed deeply in his heart.

His entire body was buried in the sand, and he was blindfolded to boot.

If anyone were to see this, they would probably treat him as some kind of massive freak... No, this was deviant enough even without requiring an observer.

Sigh, that being said, being buried in the sand like this also counted as a sort of purification.

(Rather than blindfolding me, why not get changed somewhere farther away?) That was what he thought.

Rather, Claire and the girls possibly thought that he was far enough away.

...Only at times like these did Kamito truly curse his especially keen hearing, honed during his training at the Instructional School.

"S-Somehow, my heart is beating especially fast, a-as soon as I realize I am getting naked outdoors..."

"Y-Yes... I feel like I am doing something unmentionable..."

Presumably unaware that Kamito could hear them, the girls began to whisper among themselves.

"But this feeling of liberation is really great. Even addictive...♪"

"Fianna, w-what are you talking about!?"

More rustling.

"...Ugh, th-the sand... is getting into weird places... Ah... What a pain."

"The sensation... ugh... feels a bit disgusting. I-I prefer bathing with water after all."

Rustle... The sound of thighs rubbing together.

(Hey, give me a break...!)

In the sand, Kamito could not help but blush.

"U-Uwah! W-What is this...!?"

Just then, Ellis cried out.

"Ellis, what is the matter?"

"N-Nothing... Uh, umm..."

"Wait a sec, what is with that underwear! It's constricting your breasts tightly, isn't it!?"

"And here I thought Ellis was so prim and proper. You are unexpectedly bold..."

"Captain, th-this is indecent!"

"W-Wrong!"

Ellis denied with a sobbing tone of voice.

"What do you mean, wrong?"

"Th-This is my esteemed sister's swimsuit! Looks like it got into my luggage by accident..."

"Ah, I see..."

"A unexpectedly clumsy girl."

Fianna murmured with some exasperation.

"...Sob."

...Unable to see anything, Kamito imagined the scene.

Compared to Ellis' outstanding figure, Velsaria would definitely be considered slender.

If Ellis were to put on her underwear, what would it look like...?

...No matter what, Kamito was a teenage boy.

Currently, girls in his age group were putting on embarrassing underwear nearby.

Even though his eyes were covered, it only stimulated his imagination further.

(...! N-No...!)

Kamito could not help but shake his head, trying to dispel the annoying thoughts surfacing in his mind.

However, the girls began to purify themselves with a sand bath, ignorant of Kamito's efforts.

"Okay, let us first rinse our bodies with sand."

Fianna seemed to be enjoying herself.

"I-I feel a bit repulsed..."

"It feels weird."



Despite their verbal grumbling, Kamito could hear the rustling from the girls scooping sand.

"...~, nn... Ah... The feeling of sand moving feels so itchy."

"It is getting to my bottom... Nn, it is sticking..."

"...Ah, s-sliding across... my breasts... Hyah♪"

"Ellis, bathing like that is not going to get your breasts clean♪"

"Y-Your Highness, what are you doing, guh... Ah♪"

Even moans were coming from the usually prim and proper Ellis.

(W-What the hell is going on...!?)

Kamito could not help but gulp.

...At this rate, it felt like all kinds of crazy things were going to happen!

(I-I guess I'll dive into the sand and leave first...) Earth Stealth Movement—  
Using an assassination technique from the Instructional School, he twisted his body, burrowing into the sand.

But perhaps because of this, or possibly because it was not tightly tied in the first place, his blindfold fell off.

"...!"

Thus, the scene illuminated by fire entered Kamito's eyes.

Claire froze, in the middle of removing her panties to get rid of the sand. Rinslet had her adorable butt raised in Kamito's direction. As for Fianna, she was using sand to rub Ellis' soft breasts, overflowing from the triangular pieces of fabric straining to contain them.

The dream-like scene made Kamito's brain short circuit for an instance, leaving him frozen in his spot.

"...! U-Uwah! K-Kamito, w-what, w-what are you doing!?"

Noticing his gaze, Claire cried out with her face all red.

"S-Shameless!"

"K-Kamito, what a pervert!"

"N-No wait! The blindfold accidentally fell off—"

Realizing his life was in danger, Kamito instantly stood up from the sand.

Seeing his bare upper torso, the girls screamed.

"W-What are you exposing to us!? W-What a pervert! Exhibitionist! Lewd beast!"

"Now who's the exhibitionist, look at yourselves..."

Hit by Claire's one-sided wave of accusations, Kamito did not back down.

"B-Besides, if you're going to take a sand bath, why not do it somewhere farther away!?"

"W-Well—"

"Certainly not. It's not every day that I get to wear a swimsuit. Kamito-kun has to take a good look♪"

"Y-You, y-you, what are you talking about? You idiot princess, you perverted princess!"

Claire kept hammering her fists against Fianna. Her developing body, clad in swimwear, was so adorable that it made Kamito's heart race.

"A-Anyway, Kamito, turn around now!"

"Fine..."

Seeing Claire about to swing her whip any time, Kamito hastily turned his gaze away.

Just as he was sighing "good grief"...

"...Huh?"

He could not help but make a stupid sound.

In front of him was—

*A giant floating in the air, glowing with blue-white light.*

"Wha—"

Before he could finish saying the word "what," in that instant...

CRAAASH!

The giant landed on the ground.

"Kyahhhhh!"

"W-What is going on!?"

The landing's shockwave blew away everything in the surroundings, creating a massive cloud of sand and dust.

"...! W-What is this thing!?"

Barely managing to stand firm, Kamito opened his eyes and looked at the giant before him once more.

The giant had a muscular body and a bull's head.

Carrying a massive double-edged sword, it stood with upright posture while staring down intently at Kamito.

"W-What the heck, you...!"

Coughing repeatedly from the sand, Claire shouted, still in her swimsuit.

"...! How dare you... the curry... Unforgivable!"

Rinslet swiftly deployed her elemental waffe bow. Blown away by the wind, the empty pot was rolling at her feet.

...The curry was a total loss.

"Hold on, you two!"

Seeing Claire and Rinslet about to attack, Fianna hurried to stop them.

"That is a spirit, you know?"

"A spirit? But Your Highness, aren't there no spirits in this desert?"

Ellis raised her doubt.

Indeed, there were no spirits residing in Ghul-a-val... That was the way it was supposed to be.

(Then what the heck is this thing...?)

Kamito secretly jumped in surprise.

...No, the giant in front of him was definitely a spirit.

Moreover, it was very close to humanoid—A high-level spirit. Indeed, it would come to no surprise if a high-level spirit had been living in the desert all along—  
In the next instant...

Wham—The bull-headed giant swung the great sword in its hand.

The tip of the sword was pointed right at Kamito's nose.

"...! Kamito!"

Claire cried out in fright.

However, Kamito remained motionless, because he did not sense any hostility.

<I am the judge—the one to judge whether thou art worthy.> The giant spoke. The deep voice echoed throughout the desert at night.

"Worthy? Of what?"

<My master welcomes only the worthy to the Tomb—> "Did you say *tomb*'?"

Kamito instantly realized with alarm.

(Could this spirit be...?)

"The guardian of the Demon King's Tomb...?"

Behind him, Claire spoke with surprise.

"...I see. So you're the *door guard*."

Staring at the sword tip pointed at him, Kamito said.

The Demon King's Tomb had some kind of guardian, this was expected.

However, he never thought the guardian would actively show up like this—  
(But this is actually to our advantage...)

Since this spirit appeared—

Then it was highly likely that the Demon King's Tomb actually existed in this desert.

"Then—"

Glaring back at the spirit, Kamito spoke.

"Then how do we prove whether we're worthy or not?"

<—There is only one method to judge. Demonstrate thy power.> "...Thought so."

Kamito shrugged.

He took a few steps back and pulled out the two swords, his contracted spirits, embedded in the ground nearby—The Demon Slayer and the Vorpall Sword.

Then he smiled fearlessly.

"—Suits me just fine."

If the condition demanded was royal blood or something like that, Kamito would honestly be in a bind— But an opponent that only needed to be conquered by force, that made things easy.

'—Kamito, better not be careless.'

As soon as he picked up the demon sword of darkness, Restia's voice sounded in his mind.

"Restia, do you know this spirit?"

'Yes. This was is one of the seventy-two spirits used by the Demon King in the past, the guardian spirit, the Sphinx. According to the human system of classification, it's archdemon-class.'

"Archdemon-class, huh?"

Among missions at Areishia Spirit Academy, this was a target of maximum difficulty. They were said to be spirits that lived only in the deepest reaches of the Spirit Forest. Even Velsaria Eva had taken several weeks to singlehandedly take down an archdemon-class spirit.

However, Kamito was unfazed.

"It's not like legend-class or mythic-class, right? *No problem—*"

Throwing out bold words, Kamito poured divine power into his two swords.

The sacred sword of steel glowed with silver-white brilliance while the demon sword of darkness became shrouded in jet-black demonic light.

"Kamito, we'll fight too."

"I must avenge my curry!"

The young ladies had readied their respective elemental waffen and were about to rushing over.

However, Kamito shook his head.

"Thanks, but it's better if you girls stand back—"

"W-Why!?"

"Even if it is us, we are able to help!"

"Yeah, I know. But you won't be able to make the most of your contracted spirit's power unless you properly finish purifying yourselves, right?"

"Uh..."

Claire instantly became speechless.

The Flametongue in her hand only had a fraction of its usual flames. Ellis and Rinslet's elemental waffen were also in a similar state.

"Everyone, leave this to Kamito-kun."

"F-Fine..."

You leave me no choice—Muttering, Claire dispelled Flametongue.

"Kamito, you're on your own if you lose, okay?"

Kamito silently nodded and stepped forward.

In fact, there was another reason why Kamito had chosen to fight alone.

This spirit had said—Demonstrate thy power.

If the whole team ganged up to defeat the spirit, they might not be recognized as worthy.

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The judge—The Sphinx—roared, shaking the ground like an earthquake The

atmosphere instantly grew tense. Kamito felt an intensely oppressive aura stimulating his skin.

"Perfect timing. Now let's see if I'm worthy or not—"

Kamito grinned.

In the next instant, he released the divine power concentrated beneath his feet and charged forward all at once.

## Part 3

(A large archdemon-class spirit, I'll use the Destructive Form to end this in one go!) The combat style of performing a blade dance was very different from that of hunting spirits.

The former emphasized exchanging exciting and varying sword moves with the opponent while the latter emphasized the direct clash of power against power.

Pouring his entire divine energy into his elemental waffen, Kamito unleashed a heavy strike in one breath— This was the hunting method that Greyworth had taught him through practical combat.

"Ohhhhhhhh!"

The glowing divine power released from his entire body illuminated the night desert brightly.

Kamito unleashed a dual-wielding move from the Absolute Blade Arts— Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance, Thousand Strikes of Swift Thunder.

Rather than an anti-personnel sword technique, this move was created for defeating large spirits.

The Sphinx swung its large sword horizontally.

Accompanied by a howling sandstorm, it attacked Kamito.

(Cheap trick—)

Confronted with a mad dance of innumerable wind blades, Kamito dashed forward resolutely.

The trajectories of the wind blades were impossible to discern.

However, just by seeing the flow of sand in the air, evasion was nothing difficult.



The wind blades brushed past his cheek, splashing blood, but Kamito lunged at the giant's chest, completely unfazed.

"Absolute Blade Dance, Destructive Form—Bursting Blossom Spiral—"

Suddenly, he stopped the sword move's activation and took a defensive stance with his twin swords crossed.

A crimson heat beam silently flew past the edge of the swords.

(...What!?)

BOOOM!

An explosion produced a shockwave, sending Kamito flying.

"Guh—"

While he was recovering his posture and landing on the sand, a second heat beam shot at him.

Before his mind actively made a decision, his right hand reflexively swung the Demon Slayer.

Clang—A harsh sound rang out.

Deflected, the heat beam struck somewhere diagonally behind him. A giant pillar of flame erupted with the sound of an explosion.

A direct hit would have turned Kamito to charcoal in an instant. No, even an attempt to defend would have been futile if he did not have the strongest sword spirit in his hand.

Such terrifying power and accuracy in attack— (...Tsk, that attack just now was—)

Kamito could now read the Sphinx's movements completely.

In that case—

Kamito forcefully looked up into the sky.

Only to see—

A dog-headed giant floating in the air, holding a staff in its hand.

"...Tsk, there's another one!?"

Kamito's expression stiffened involuntarily.

"Wait a sec, no one told me anything..."

In contrast to the bull-headed Sphinx specialized for close combat, the dog-headed one seemed to be the type focusing on long-range attacks.

'—The Sphinx is a system of four entities in charge of different roles.'

"What the heck, telling me after the fact is so unfair!"

'Kamito, you will surely find a way to handle it.'

Restia replied nonchalantly.

...Her words were the exact same as when Greyworth tossed him into a forest three years ago.

However, fighting two archdemon-class spirits simultaneously was not a challenge he had encountered during Greyworth's inhumane training— 'Low-level spirits like these are no match for Kamito.'

Est chimed in with a comment in the same vein.

(Low-level spirits...)

From Est's perspective, perhaps even archdemon-class spirits were merely on that level— While grimacing in his heart, Kamito readied his two swords.

...Sigh, he had already bragged to Claire and the girls that he would handle things alone.

Even if his opponent increased by one, he had no choice but to charge head on.

(I have two ultimate spirits on my side after all—) The bull-headed giant roared and charged.

This Sphinx probably symbolized strength.

A close combat type with emphasis on strength—This was not hard to handle for Kamito.

(The dog-headed one is the problem, huh—)

Hovering in the air, the dog-headed one seemed to be responsible for

covering the bull-headed one. Finding an opening would not be that easy.

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Faced with the Sphinx's downward swing at full strength— Kamito used the back of the Demon Slayer to block and parry.

A simple contest of strength would be too disadvantageous for him. With nimble footwork, Kamito— "Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form—Shadowmoon Waltz, Major Double Turn."

He executed a flowing flurry of haphazard strikes.

The storm of black and white slashes instantly swirled. The particles of divine power constituting the Sphinx's body were scattered on the red desert like droplets of blood.

However, the archdemon-class spirit did not suffer critical damage.

(Too weak, huh—)

Shadowmoon Waltz was a move from the Absolute Blade Arts for group battles.

Despite the overwhelming quantity of attacks, it was somewhat inferior in power.

(No, that's not the issue here—)

The Sphinx's great sword swept across. Kamito ducked down slightly, evading the sword in the nick of time.

(I'm subconsciously scared of using divine power—) The Absolute Blade Arts required unifying the manipulation of divine power with the attack motion. If he were to consume too much divine power by accident, the Darkness Elemental Lords's power lying dormant in his body might awaken. Overly afraid of this, Kamito was unintentionally limiting himself.

However, this made it impossible to defeat highly durable spirits.

(One instant. Within a very brief instant, an explosion of divine power—) While evading the massive swinging attacks, Kamito stepped into his opponent's opening.

(Ten seconds—No, seven. I'm going all out. Will you endure it?) 'Yes, Kamito—'

'Leave it to me—'

The strongest twin swords replied with white and black brilliance.

The Sphinx in front of him swung its great sword, enveloped in a gale. Dodging the strike in the nick of time, Kamito stepped on the flat of the sword while it embedded itself into the ground, then jumped on to the enemy's head.

Then—

"Absolute Blade Arts, Second Form—Meteor!"

A move derived from Purple Lightning—Meant to kill in one strike, it struck the head violently.

The Demon Slayer, infused with his entire body's divine power— Smashed the Sphinx's horn.

'Kamito—!'

Restia warned. Of course, Kamito was aware. In the earlier attack, he had learned to read the preparatory motions of the Sphinx in the air.

While landing, he immediately moved. Kamito circled around to the bull-headed spirit's back, using its massive body as a shield.

The downpour of heat beams rained down, piercing the Sphinx's body all over.

BOOOOOM!

An explosion. Even with the spirit as a shield, one would not survive unscathed if caught up in the explosion.

However, Kamito was no longer visible there. The moment the heat beams struck, Kamito had used the dust cloud as cover to approach the Sphinx in the air.

The dog head turned, creating countless fireballs around its staff.

(Too late—)

Kamito skillfully launched the Demon Slayer.

However, instead of aiming at the Sphinx above, the target was the ground a couple steps in front of him.

Gathered at the staff's tip, the fireballs turned into heat beams, pouring down as a scorching rain of fire— In that instant, Kamito jumped high. Stepping on the hilt of the sacred sword embedded in the ground, he allowed his divine power to explode.

This was different from ordinary Terrain Reduction executed by concentrating divine power beneath his feet and letting it explode— Instead, he caused the divine power poured into the Demon Slayer to return to him, in a very violent manner.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Seventh Form—Biting Dragon!"

Like an arrow leaving the bowstring—

Fired upwards, Kamito swung the demon sword of darkness in the air.

Together with the staff in its hand, the Sphinx was cut into two immediately.

The dog-headed spirit turned into particles of light, disappearing into thin air. As expected, this Sphinx was lacking in durability.

Somersaulting using his residual momentum, Kamito then landed on the sand.

"Now, it's one versus one—"

Pulling out the Demon Slayer, Kamito turned around to face the bull-headed Sphinx.

"Let's end this next—"

Pouring divine power into both swords, Kamito readied himself to execute the Absolute Blade Arts' ultimate move—the Destructive Form.

Just then—

<—Thy power, comprehensible.>

The Sphinx lowered the great sword in its hand and spoke.

"...?"

<—The Tomb's path opens. The Demon King's successor is granted an audience with the Queen.> Saying that, the Sphinx's body turned into particles of light and gradually disappeared— "H-Hey...!"

Before Kamito could stop the Sphinx—

It vanished without trace.

...Only leaving dust in the wind.

"Uh, I guess, I'm approved...?"

Faced with a conclusion that came too anticlimactically— Kamito could not help but feel drained, frozen to the spot.

"Kamito!"

"Kamito-kun!"

The girls rushed over from behind the ship's wreckage from where they had been watching the battle.

"Kamito-san, are you alright?"

"Yeah, it's nothing..."

Kamito nodded ambiguously.

Although the two archdemon-class spirits were formidable foes, compared to the Greyworth in her prime that he had fought at Dracunia, they were nothing at all.

"By the way, what exactly is that worthiness..."

Kamito muttered to himself. Just then...

"What is that!?"

Ellis shouted, pointing out into the desert where sand was blowing.

"...?"

Everyone looked in the same direction.

Only to see—

"W-What is that—?"

From beyond the horizon, a giant shadow emerged.

"It clearly was not there just now..."

"Indeed..."

The young ladies murmured in surprise, exchanging looks.

After a beat's delay—

"Say, could it be..."

Fianna slowly began to speak.

"...Is that the Demon King's Capital?"

## Part 4

Late at night. Inside an office where a small lamp was lit— Rubia Elstein was currently reading secret documents uncovered from Scorpia.

Most of these secret documents were about the Ranbal War.

This great war started from a minor territorial dispute between Ordesia and the Holy Kingdom of Lugia that finally drew in the entire continent.

Even though an eternal truce had been signed between the two nations since twenty-odd years ago, the war's effects still linger everywhere.

(Experiments for transferring to power of spirits to humans, experiments for inducing spirits to self-destruct so that their internal energy went amok... This is more terrifying than imagining—) Rubia lit a fire at her fingertips and burned the stack of documents to cinders.

Such severe crimes, going as far as to turn spirits into instruments of war, it was nauseating.

The Theocracy was not alone. In those days, every country did similar things.

Even her home country, the Ordesia Empire, had been researching cursed armament seals and strategic-class militarized spirits that had been modified into weapons of mass destruction.

(I have no right to mock such folly, I suppose—)

Rubia Elstein narrowed her ruby-like eyes and mocked herself.

She had corrupted her own body with cursed armament seals for the sake of obtaining power, thus disqualifying herself as a pure princess maiden.

Of course, she had no regrets. But—

(This filthy body no longer has the right to hold my little sister's hand—) This was the only thing that she missed, weighing on her mind.



(But that man—)

Suddenly, Kamito's face appeared in her mind.

Recalling the first time in her life to show her naked body to a man, she instantly blushed, her face turning hot.

She had never experienced such feelings in her entire life.

As soon as she thought of him, her heart became strangely unsettled.

(Why—?)

Just then, suddenly, she felt intense pain from her right hand.

Her face contorted by the sharp pain, as acute as being burned by fire, she cast her gaze upon her right hand, only to see— A crimson emblem, symbolizing fire, was glowing brilliantly.

"...Wh... at...?"

Rubia widened her ruby-like eyes.

This was the brand that had not disappeared even after she had disqualified herself as a princess maiden.

—The seal of the spirit contract formed with the Fire Elemental Lord.

# Chapter 5 - The Demon King's Capital

## Part 1

A city suddenly appeared from behind a sandstorm.

By the time Kamito and the girls reached the city gates on foot, dawn was almost about to break.

"Hey Kamito... Are we hallucinating? Or is this a mirage?"

"That's what I hope—"

Kamito muttered. The scenery in front of him was stunning him, rooting him to the ground.

...Even with it right before his eyes, it was still unbelievable.

Surrounded by sturdy city walls, this place was not some kind of ancient ruins — Instead, it was a dizzyingly great metropolis, filled with the vibrancy and noise of crowds.

"...N-No way, how could such a city exist right in the middle of the desert?"

Claire kept blinking and she even pinched Kamito's cheek.

"...It hurts, cut it out."

Even though they all had countless questions in their minds— Kamito and company still stepped into the gate.

The main road extending from the city gate had countless residences and shops lined along it. Loaded with cargo, horse-drawn carts were moving back and forth through a plaza filled with open-air stalls.

The people in the streets were dressed similar to the Theocracy's attire, but there were minute differences in the design of accessories and how they wore their turbans compared to the residents of Mordis.

"This isn't the result of spirit magic or a barrier—"

Wiping sweat from her forehead, Fianna spoke.

"The people here all look alive."

Claire and the girls exchanged looks. If this were a hallucination generated by spirit magic or a barrier, Fianna would have seen through it—That was what they had expected.

"I-Impossible! After all, this is a desert of death!"

"That's right. It's hard to believe even when I'm seeing it."

"I cannot believe it either. No matter what spirit, this sort of thing is—"

"Impossible—I wouldn't be so sure of that, Your Highness."

Jet-black feathers floated from the sky as a darkness spirit appeared in a dress in the color of night.

"Restia—"

"If one were to pray to a powerful spirit, such as an Elemental Lord, for a miracle, wouldn't this sort of thing be possible?"

"What, are you saying you know something, darkness spirit?"

Hearing this, Claire frowned, but Restia shook her head.

"It doesn't count as knowing, but I cannot imagine anyone capable of this except for powerful spirits."

"Dracunia's Dragon King, for instance?"

"Indeed. It might be possible for spirits on that level."

"Anyway, this is the Demon King's Tomb, right?"

This time it was Kamito's turn to raise a question.

"Yes, though technically, this is the Demon King's Capital rather than the Tomb. This is undoubtedly Alkazard, the capital of Zodia, Demon King

Solomon's kingdom. Furthermore, it continues to look as it did a thousand years ago."

Restia nodded and spoke with a slightly perplexed expression.

No one doubted her. After all, she had witnessed the Demon King's Capital with her own eyes a thousand years ago— "Uh, what happened exactly?"

"Who knows...?"

Restia closed her eyes and shook her head.

It looked like the truth eluded her too.

This was the Demon King's Capital, supposedly destroyed by Sacred Maiden Areishia a thousand years earlier.

Why did it continue to exist unchanged to this very day?

"Look! The people who exit the gate disappear gradually—"

Hearing Claire's voice, Kamito and the others looked back towards the city gate.

They saw pedestrians and horse-drawn carriages outside the city gate disappearing gradually like a mirage.

"W-What on earth is going on...?"

"A-Are they hallucinations after all? But—"

Rinslet could not help but feel afraid. Ellis murmured with a look of incomprehension.

"...Well, staying here won't solve anything."

Claire shrugged and turned her gaze to the crowded plaza.

"Anyway, let's enter and check it out."

"Yeah—"

## Part 2

Kamito and company quickly passed through the street leading from the city gate to the plaza.

There was a canopy set up over the main street, extremely busy with crowds coming and going. The noisy and lively atmosphere was reminiscent of the market at Mordis.

Sure enough, a guy walking with five adorable girls in tow would attract a lot of attention. Along the way, the men at the open-air stalls kept booing Kamito.

Trained at the Instructional School, Kamito knew a bit of other languages apart from the continent's common tongue. However, he could not understand the merchants' speech at all.

All he could tell was that they sounded a bit similar to the Theocracy's language— "Restia, can you understand what they're talking about?"

Hence, he asked Restia, who was walking beside him.

"Let me see, lewd beast, King of Lust, hypnotist, etc..."

...He got an answer he totally did not want to know about.

"No way! Isn't King of Lust a nickname from the Academy!?"

"Fufu, Kamito's legend as the Demon King of the Night is enough to transcend space and time."

"No freaking way!"

Seeing Kamito retort angrily, Restia chuckled.

At this moment, Claire, who had been looking all around, murmured with a complicated look on her face.

"...From what I can tell, they do look just like normal people."

"Yes, and you can touch them too. It is hard to imagine this as a hallucination."

Supporting her chin with her hand, Fianna agreed.

"...Who on earth did this, and why?"

Passing through the canopied main street, they emerged to walk under the sunny blue sky.

Suddenly, Ellis noticed something and spoke out.

"...What is that?"

Where she was pointing—

A gigantic building in the shape of a tetrahedron was standing in the center of the city.

Practically gray, the walls had a metallic luster, reflecting sunlight.

Compared to the busy city scenery, this historical structure's style stood out too much.

"Is it... a historical site? In the very center of this city?"

"I have never seen this kind of site anywhere else on the continent."

Hearing Claire's question, Fianna answered.

"It does not look like a castle."

"Restia, do you know what is that?"

When Kamito asked...

"No, that location was originally occupied by the Demon King's palace."

Restia shook her head.

"What is going on?"

Kamito originally thought this city was an authentic replica of the Demon King's Capital a thousand years ago.

However, the giant tetrahedron's existence overturned this guess.

Since this kind of structure had been placed intentionally in the center, it

must represent some kind of purpose of the city's creator— "Hey, perhaps that's the Demon King's Tomb?"

"...Seems quite likely."

Kamito agreed with Claire's suggestion.

A gigantic structure replacing the original palace.

It did not take a huge leap of logic to guess that this was the Demon King's tomb.

"First of all, I suppose we should first investigate the pyramid."

"Yeah—"

Just then, Kamito noticed.

Restia was resting her chin on her hand pensively, staring at the pyramid.

"What's wrong, Restia?"

"Somehow, that structure really bothers me—"

She replied ambiguously.

"Isn't that the Demon King's Tomb?"

"Yes, that may well be right, but—"

Spreading her jet-black wings, Restia floated up lightly in the air.

Sand on the ground danced as a result.

"I will check things out nearby—"

"H-Hey, Restia!?"

Before Kamito could stop her—

With a turn of her night-colored dress, the darkness spirit flew towards the pyramid.

Watching her back as she receded into the distance, Kamito sighed wryly.

"...She just does whatever she likes, as always."

"Seriously, staying together is the basics of teamwork!"

With sand blown into her hair, Claire was so offended that her twintails stood on end.

"In any case, we should first investigate this city."

Ellis suggested.

"...Yeah, there are too many mysteries here."

Hearing that, Kamito agreed.

Also, he was quite concerned whether Princess Saladia was here or not. After all, finding this city was impossible unless one accepted the Sphinx's judgment.

"Before that, let's establish a base somewhere and rest up first."

"Yes, proper purification would be nice—"

"A-Agreed!"

Tormented by the desert heat, Rinslet voiced her support with exuberance.



## Part 3

With her jet-black wings outspread, the darkness spirit looked down at the giant pyramid from the sky.

The legendary Demon King's castle—The Zohar Palace—should have been wrecked thoroughly by the Salvation Army led by Sacred Maiden Areishia.

Come to think of it, that pyramid would be the tombstone for commemorating the Demon King, right?

(...No entrance. Are the walls made of orihalcon?) Restia plucked a feather and tossed it at the giant structure beneath her.

Jet-black lightning immediately exploded on the surface of the pyramid.

It then disappeared without a trace.

(To think it deflected magic from me, a top-tier spirit...) Making an expression as though her pride had been hurt, Restia murmured to herself.

A barrier had been erected, sufficient to nullify serious attacks from high-level spirits.

This was evidently no ordinary gigantic historical building.

"...Next, what shall I do?"

Restia crossed her arms and sighed.

"Since my magic is not working, then breaking the barrier would require Miss Sacred Sword infused with Kamito's serious divine power, or *those flames* of the hell cat girl's?"

*I shall investigate a little more first*—Just as she was about to land...

'Are you the darkness spirit Restia Ashdoll...?'

"...!?"

Suddenly, she heard a voice in her mind.

(...What?)

She heightened her awareness of her surroundings, but could not see where the voice came from.

Just then—

'I have waited for you so long—'

The voice spoke again.

At the same time, a change came to the part of the wall that she had just attacked.

"...Eh?"

The pyramid's surface became twisted like a marshmallow.

It suddenly cracked open to reveal a large hole.

The hole seemed to be beckoning for her to enter.

"Are you calling me?"

'Yes. You, as well as the successor you chose—'

At this time, Restia finally realized.

The identity of the ruler of this mysterious Demon King's Capital.

"I see now—"

Narrowing her dusk-colored eyes, she murmured quietly— Next, the darkness spirit flapped her pitch-black wings and landed in the hole that had opened up.

## Part 4

"Huh!? What the hell is up with this city!?"

Somewhere in the city, a young man was cursing irritably.

"Every one of them, *acting alive when they're actually dead!* This is pissing me off!"

"Calm down, Jio Inzagi."

A veiled young maiden tried to soothe the young man who was losing his temper.

"This is the Demon King's Capital, unchanged from a thousand years ago. The fact that this city has been preserved to this day is evidence that the Demon King's power lies hidden here."

"...I don't need you to tell me that, princess."

Jio Inzagi revealed a savage countenance.

"However, that whatever coffin is inside that crazy big tomb. No entrance, and I can't break in either. What the hell do I do, argh! We've been here two whole days, yeah?"

Indeed, they had first step foot into this strange city two days ago.

After walking endlessly through Ghul-a-val, they had encountered the Sphinx.

Against the spirit that called itself the Tomb's guardian, Jio Inzagi was no match at all.

It was not an enemy who could be beaten by petty tricks and cursed armament seals.

Hence, he was not recognized as worthy of entering the tomb.

However, things were different for Saladia Kahn.

She did not overcome the powerful spirit with strength.

When she summoned her grimoire elemental waffe—Alf Laylah Wa-Laylah—and chanted something, possibly a code, the Sphinx vanished without doing anything.

Then, this city suddenly appeared far out in the desert.

The second princess, inheriting the Kahn dynasty's bloodline, evidently held a key capable of entering the Tomb.

Jio found it unbelievable that the Sphinx had not recognized him, the Demon King's successor— But whatever, in any case, they managed to enter this Demon King's capital.

However, their problems were far from over. According to the princess, the Demon King's coffin was hidden underground in the Demon King's Tomb in the city's center.

However, they could not find an entrance to the pyramid anywhere.

Also, there was a secure barrier covering the exterior walls.

"Damn it, the Demon King's power lies within reach, yet I—"

Looking up at the gigantic pyramid, Jio Inzagi clenched his fist tightly.

"Perhaps the Kahn dynasty's bloodline alone is not enough to activate the Tomb."

"Huh!? Then why the hell did I need to bring you here?"

"I-It is not like I begged you to save me!"

Saladia Kahn retorted unhappily.

"Huh, what is this, some kind of sick joke? You're useless!"

"Watch your words! Insolent one, do know that I, of the Kahn dynasty, am—"

"Wait."

Suddenly—

Jio Inzagi covered Saladia's mouth.

"...! Mmph, mmmph, mmph!"

"Quiet. Hey, *what is that?*"

"...?"

Jio Inzagi looked up.

Saladia frowned and followed his gaze, only to see— A strange figure in the air over the pyramid.

A beautiful maiden, with jet-black wings outspread— "Is that a spirit...?"

Pulling Jio's hand off her face, Saladia whispered.

Jio Inzagi's eyes widened, glaring at the maiden.

"...Urgh... I know, ah... I, know... that spirit—"

"What is the matter with you?"

"...She is the spirit, that erased, my memories..."

From his throat came a groaning voice.

That darkness spirit from the Instructional School whom he had partnered with before.

Why was she in this kind of place?

"...Darkness, spirit... Resti... a... Restia Ashdoll!"

Filled with rage, Jio Inzagi's roar echoed through the entire street.

# Chapter 6 - The Mysterious Merchant

## Part 1

Kamito and company went around the pyramid, following the streets to search for lodgings.

Another giant structure with a distinctive look appeared before them.

"What is that thing?"

"Such an odd building."

Ellis involuntarily tilted her head.

"That is a *barnea*, a ancient type of accommodations complex."

Fianna raised a finger and explained.

"In other words, a hotel?"

"Yes, quite similar. There should be a large bathing facility inside, allowing us to purify ourselves."

"Eh, really?"

Claire's smiling face became radiant.

"It's not a sand bath, right?"

"Of course not."

According to Fianna, who had had contact with foreign cultures while growing up in the Divine Ritual Institute, a *barnea* was a large combined facility centered on a temple for worshiping spirits and included baths, restaurants and accommodations. Although they were rare in western regions of the continent

such as Ordesia, but temples of this sort were actually mainstream in the Theocracy.

Speaking of which, many of the hotels reserved for nobles during their stay at Ragna Ys for the Blade Dance were quite similar to this one too. The Water Spirit Festival that he had attended with Leonora as partners had also been held at a lakeside pool that was part of this kind of hotel facility.

"Should we establish our base here for now?"

"I suppose, but wouldn't the room rates be quite expensive?"

Acting totally unlike a noble daughter from a former duke's family, Claire raised a commoner's worry.

...Indeed, prices here looked to be much more expensive than ordinary inns.

"Hmph, how trivial. Leave such matters to me."

Tossing her platinum blonde hair, Rinslet declared with pride.

"I knew something like this would come up, so I brought plenty of money from home."

With a snap of her fingers, Fenrir, who had been crouching at her feet, spat out imperial gold coins with a clatter.

"You're treating a high-level spirit as a piggy bank..."

"Always be prepared."

Rinslet confidently puffed out her chest.

"But is the Empire's currency usable in this city?"

Upon hearing Ellis' very legitimate question— "..."

Rinslet froze in her proud posture.

"W-What an unexpected blind spot!"

"...Sheesh, you should've realized from the start."

Claire sighed deeply.

Kamito looked at the stalls all around them. They were using money, but sure enough, it was quite different from that circulating on the continent.

"Ooh... To think I brought the money... but it is useless here?"

Seeing his master hang her head in dejection, Fenrir licked her cheek.

"Uh, I remember that Ordesia's imperial gold coins contain real gold, right?"

Kamito suddenly recalled something and brought it up.

"Yes, they are authentic gold coins."

"Then can't you find someone to buy them as gold?"

"I can't believe Kamito came up with a great idea. Although we'll probably get gouged, there's no other way."

Hearing his suggestion, Claire nodded.

"W-Well fancy that!"

Rinslet cheered up again and lifted her face.

"And not just money. I wonder if amulets and spirit crystals can be sold too?"

Kamito and company looked around, trying to find a merchant to buy their gold coins.

Hopefully, they could sell them for a good price— "I would recommend against it. The merchants of Alkazard are extremely greedy. They will swallow you whole as soon as they figure you out as amateurs."

"...!?"

Hearing a sudden voice, Kamito forcefully turned his head back to see— Standing there was a man with a friendly smile, dressed like a desert merchant. He had appeared without any of them noticing.

"...Who are you?"

Kamito asked in surprise.

The man looked a bit older than Kamito, probably twenty-years-old or so. Lightly tanned skin. Black irises. His tough countenance seemed reminiscent of a wild eagle.

"Excuse me. I am Safian, a merchant of Zohar."

The young man bent forward, bowing solemnly to Kamito's group.



"Did you say Zohar!?"

Claire exclaimed in surprise.

Logically speaking, the current capital of the Theocracy would not have existed back in the Demon King's time, a thousand years ago.

Furthermore, there was a decisive difference between this man and the residents of the Demon King's Capital.

(...He's using the same language as us, the continent's common tongue.)  
Kamito swiftly exchanged a glance with Claire.

Claire nodded lightly. Evidently, they had found someone with a clue.

"You're not a resident of this city?"

Hearing that, the man nodded.

"Indeed. As expected, the same goes for you, *people from outside*."

"That's right."

While staring at the man's eyes, Kamito nodded cautiously.

"It appears that you have questions for me."

The young man smiled then turned his gaze towards the barnea.

"Well, this is no place for conversation. How about we talk over a meal?"

## Part 2

Despite suspicions towards the mysterious merchant who had suddenly appeared— Kamito and his friends still decided to listen to what he had to say.

...After all, this was the only clue in this unbelievable and completely incomprehensible situation.

Perhaps this man might have information on the whereabouts of Princess Saladia, or know something about the strange pyramid.

"Better not trust him too much. He looks suspicious no matter what."

Claire quietly whispered into Kamito's ear.

"I don't think it's nice to judge by appearance."

"That's true... But contrary to how I seem, I'm actually an excellent judge of character."

"Really? I remember the first time we met, you straight out accused me of being a lewd beast."

"That first impression wasn't too far off the mark."

"Give me a break..."

"Hey Claire, what are you chatting with Kamito-kun about?"

Fianna drew up to the two of them, trying to join in the conversation.

Unconcerned with what Kamito and the others were doing—

The young merchant walked straight through the entrance of a gigantic barnea.

Inside was a beautiful garden with a fountain. Flowers of all colors were blooming.

"This Quseir Amra was originally a place for worshiping the city's spirits. Its

current appearance is the result of continual expansion, including purification and resting facilities for princess maidens and a temple for making offerings."

Safian looked up at the giant building in front of him and spoke.

"...I see."

Quseir Amra was apparently the name of this barnea. Its unique appearance was the result of haphazard expansion rather than some sort of artistic design.

The ground floor of the building was a grand restaurant facing the garden. It was not crowded inside.

Safian brought Kamito's group to a table.

"Please take a seat—"

Invited to sit, Kamito and company sat down on what appeared to be a sofa.

The young ladies all sat next to Kamito. Although there was space next to the male merchant, no one sat on his side. Even though they were more used to it now, sure enough, these sheltered young ladies of nobility did not usually have contact with men after all.

"Kamito, I-I feel like we are drawing stares..."

Ellis nervously huddled up, timidly looking around at the nearby tables.

Indeed, their table was particularly striking. They could even hear whispers from all around.

"After all, your manner of dress is quite a rare sight. Furthermore—"

Safian smiled wryly.

"As many as five beautiful maidens, of course, people are going to notice."

"...Hey, I'm a guy."

Kamito glared sharply at the merchant before him.

"Just joking, but what a shame. A bit of make up and you would surely be an otherworldly beautiful young—"

"Damn you—"

Kamito poured serious killing intent into his glare, but Safian remained

unfazed, simply smiling.

"Anyway, let's eat first. I'm starving."

"Seconded!"

Hearing the hungry Claire's suggestion, Rinslet agreed wholeheartedly.

## Part 3

"Now then, where should I start?"

Sweeping his gaze across Kamito's group, Safian slowly began to speak.

"...You're not a resident of this city, right?"

Claire was the first to ask a question.

"Correct, I am not from here. Besides, it is debatable whether the residents in this city are human or not."

Recalling the residents who vanished as soon as they left the city gate, Kamito and the girls looked at one another.

Sure enough, were they something like a hallucination instead of real people..?

"How did you get here? Ordinary people can't possibly come here, right?"

Hearing Kamito's question...

"Yes, I find it quite incredible too—"

Safian looked up at the ceiling and started to recount his story.

"It was a couple of months ago. My companions and I had set off from Zohar with a caravan headed to the Quina Empire. Along the way, we suddenly encountered a violent sandstorm—"

According to him, he had accepted a job from the guild to transport spirit crystals to the Quina Empire's Sparkling Capital and the incident happened during the journey.

While sailing through the desert, they were caught up in chaotic leylines, taking them far from their course. Such accidents would occur in the desert region once in a while.

By the time he realized, his ship was lost in Ghul-a-val, finally shipwrecked and eaten by giant beasts.

Although he had fled in desperation, he ended separated from his companions on the ship, wandering in the desert for many days.

Several days later, having exhausted all his food and water, on the verge of death— "...That spirit appeared."

"Spirit?"

"Yes, the spirit that is a giant with a bull's face."

Kamito and the girls looked at one another.

...Naturally, they remembered that spirit too.

It was presumably the Sphinx that Kamito had fought in the desert.

"The spirit healed my almost dying body and took me to this strange city. After that, I have lived here for more than half a year and even started doing business. How unbelievable. While living here, I gradually became able to understand the language."

Safian smiled wryly and shrugged.

"...Really? You've suffered a lot too."

Concurring, Kamito still could not relax completely.

The Sphinx—the spirit calling itself the judge.

Would a spirit that attacked indiscriminately, caring about nothing except Demon King eligibility, actually help someone altruistically?

(Oh well, it's impossible for humans to understand spirits, who do whatever they like...) Suddenly, he looked at the spirit seal on the left hand, recalling a certain darkness spirit who did whatever she liked. Was she still investigating the pyramid?

"Are there others like you?"

This time, it was Fianna's turn to ask a question.

"Uh, that is, people brought here by spirits—"

"Yes, I have already encountered a few. From what they told me, they were brought here after getting stranded in Ghul-a-val like me."

"Can they not leave?"

"Don't tell me something like you'll disappear as soon as you exit the city gate —"

Claire murmured nervously, but Safian smiled and shook his head.

"No need to worry about that. You can exit the gate any time, but—"

"But?"

"There are terrifying beasts living in Ghul-a-val outside. There are no sand ships here, so any attempt to leave would probably turn you into a mummified corpse out in the desert."

"...I see."

Indeed, it was hard to imagine ordinary people walking out of the desert unless they were elementalists. The merchants on sand ships were truly risking their lives for business.

"Then you plan on living in this city indefinitely?"

"That might not be half bad. After living here for a while, I have found it rather comfortable, actually."

Safian shrugged slightly.

*...Well, I suppose he might be telling the truth.*

"We are elementalists. We could help you if you wish to leave."

"Thank you for the kind offer. I shall consider it."

Hearing the suggestion from Ellis, who was driven by a strong sense of responsibility, Safian nodded ambiguously.

"By the way, have you recently come across a girl who came from outside like us? It should be during the past few days—"

At this moment, Kamito casually tried to ask about Princess Saladia— "...No, the only outsiders I met recently are you."

However, Safian only shook his head gently.

He did not seem to be lying.

In that case, perhaps the princess had yet to arrive?

During this time, their food and drinks were brought to the table.

"Wow, it looks delicious..."

Claire's stomach rumbled adorably.

"Well, let us continue our conversation later. Time to eat."

Safian raised his wine glass and smiled generously.

Rose-scented beer. Freshly baked bread. Smoked lamb made with plenty of spices. Several types of pickles. Stir-fried meat and eggs...

Although there were a few vegetables they had never seen before, the food served was not too different from what they had eaten in the Theocracy.

"Looks quite tasty."

"Y-Yes... Wait, is it really safe to eat?"

Claire seemed somewhat worried. Indeed, Kamito had his own doubts whether the food cooked in this town were the same as normal food.

"The taste is not bad."

"Hmm... A knight is bound by duty to eat what ought to be eaten."

...Presumably famished from their walk in the desert, Rinslet and Ellis immediately started on a meat dish.

(...Sigh, I guess it's fine. This merchant guy is eating too.) Before the young ladies finished it all, Kamito took some meat and inserted it into his bread to eat.

"What is this skewered barbecued meat?"

Picking up a skewer of black meat, Rinslet asked in puzzlement.

"Meat of the sand whale. You can catch them in these parts."

"No way. The sand whale went extinct long ago."



Hearing that, the knowledgeable Claire murmured softly.

Kamito tried a bite of sand whale meat too.

"...This doesn't taste that great."

Not only was the meat tough but it also had a kind of flavor that even spices could not cover up.

"Hmm, this texture is more similar to the ground dragon meat I ate in Dracunia..."

"Kamito, you've had dragon meat before?"

"Yeah, in a restaurant in Dracunia, with Leonora... Owwww!"

Sitting next to him, Claire stomped his foot hard.

"W-What are you doing!?"

"W-While we were putting our lives on the line, training on Dragon's Peak, h-how dare you go on a date!?"

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble...!

Claire's twintails were standing up on end like flames.

"T-To think I respected Leonora-dono as an honorable knight—"

"How I mustn't lower my guard!"

Ellis and Rinslet glared at Kamito angrily as well.

"—Thanks for the food."

Soon the meal ended and the table was piled with empty dishes.

Seeing the mountains of empty dishes, people from surrounding tables made astonished noises.

Elementalist girls were usually big eaters. They ate with impunity because using spirits consumed divine power.

"Let this be my treat."

Saying that, Safian took out his purse.

Hearing that, Rinslet stood up and tossed her hair glamorously.

"Hmph, do know that we are nobles. We have not fallen so low as to need charity from commoners."

"Even though we are in exile."

"P-Putting that aside, this meal shall be paid for by the courtesy of the Laurenfrost margraviate. Would you be so kind as to convert these imperial gold coins for me?"

"Yes, as you wish."

Safian laughed awkwardly and exchanged the city's coins for the imperial gold coins.

What he handed over were slightly deformed coins bearing the image of a young man.

"I have never seen such currency in the continent."

"Surely they are coins from a thousand years ago."

"..."

Suddenly, Kamito felt a strange sense of dissonance and kept staring at the coins.

"What's wrong, Kamito?"

"Oh, nothing..."

The face on the coin seemed somehow familiar—

(...Am I worrying too much?)

"Is there a purification facility here suitable for body cleansing?"

Just then, Fianna asked Safian.

"A purification bath for princess maidens is located not far from here."

"Wonderful. I can finally take a normal bath."

Claire exhaled with relief.

"What are your plans, Kamito-kun? Would you like to take a bath with us?"

Fianna bent forward, exposing her cleavage, teasing Kamito.

"I-I'll head to the room to put down our luggage, then check out the pyramid."

Kamito instantly blushed and looked away.

"Eh, are you going to the pyramid alone?"

"I'm just taking a walk to check out the neighborhood. Also, Restia might be around there."

Saying that, Kamito turned to face Safian again.

"...By the way, do you know anything about that pyramid?"

"Hmm, I can't say I do."

Safian shook his head sadly.

"Even the locals don't know who built it or why. I tried investigating before but could not even find anything resembling an entrance—"

"...I see. Looks like we'll just have to investigate patiently."

"Very well, we shall finish purifying ourselves before converging with you."

"Okay."

"Allow me to take you to your lodgings, if you don't mind. To avoid getting lost in Quseir Amra."

"...Thanks."

Nodding a little, Kamito picked up the Demon Slayer and stood up.

In fact, the suggestion was perfect for Kamito.

There was something he wanted to verify.

## Part 4

With Safian leading the way, Kamito went up Quseir Amra's twisting stairs. Similar to Areishia Spirit Academy's academic building, the internal layout was dizzyingly complicated. That being said, the Academic's unique layout was supposed to incorporate principles of spirit engineering.

(...But here, it's surely because of continual unplanned expansion.) Keeping his eyes intently on the merchant walking in front of him, Kamito pondered.

After walking up the stairs and passing through another passage, they finally arrived at the accommodations block.

"Living quarters are here. All you need to do is get sorted out at the front desk."

"...You've been a great help. Thank you very much."

"You are welcome. After all, it is rare to find people entering this city by accident. If I may be of any assistance—"

Before he could finish, Kamito swiftly closed the distance.

Instantly, he pressed his index finger on the man's neck.

"...?"

The young man looked puzzled.

"You—*Who the hell are you?*"

Kamito asked coldly.

His index finger was pressed on the carotid artery. This was an assassination technique that Kamito had learned during childhood at the Instructional School. Taking the man's life from here would be a piece of a cake.

However—

Safian remained calm and smiled confidently.

He could not be unaware of what kind of situation he was in. After all, Kamito had shown his intent to kill, enough for even ordinary people to feel it.

"An ordinary merchant—Do you really think I'll swallow that? When you first showed up in front of us, *it was completely silent.*"

Indeed, when the man spoke to them on the street, Kamito had not relaxed his guard towards the surroundings. He would have been the first to notice as soon as anyone intentionally approached the girls.

However, this man had appeared in front of Kamito's group without making a sound.

"I'm not bragging when I say you can count on one hand the people capable of doing this in my presence. At least on the level of my master or one of the Numbers specializing in stealth operations. For someone like that to be an ordinary merchant? Brought here by the Sphinx when collapsed in the middle of your journey? Like hell anyone would believe such lies."

"...I see."

Safian smiled wryly and shrugged.

"But you really cannot blame me for having no presence."

"...!?"

Instantly, Kamito widened his eyes.

"After all, I am someone who never existed in the first place."

Imperceptibly...

Safian disappeared from before his eyes then stood behind Kamito.

(...! He vanished without me noticing!?) Cold sweat flowed down Kamito's cheek.

...This was impossible. Kamito's attention did not leave the man in front of him, not even for a second.

But the fact was he had slipped away from Kamito's grasp.

(...Spirit magic for spatial movement? No, it's not that kind of trick—) The man must have moved during an opening in Kamito's attention. Nothing more than that.

Kamito's entire body stiffened. Safian spoke to him.

"You should use the Demon Slayer if you truly intended to threaten me."

"...! How do you know about Est!? Who the hell are you—"

"I am a fragment."

"...Fragment?"

"Yes, a fragment of his regret, remaining in this Demon King's Capital—"

"...? What are you talking about?"

Safian smiled and turned his back to Kamito, walking down the stairs where they had come from.

"I am glad to meet you, Demon King's successor and holder of the Sacred Sword. She must have been the one to guide you and your companions here."

"...! Wait, what the hell does this all mean?"

Kamito hastily chased after him.

However, Safian, who was supposed to be descending the stairs, had already vanished without a sound.

## Part 5

A large sand ship had arrived at the camp of the Knights of Lugia.

Not a merchant ship. Instead, this was an official military vessel equipped by the Holy Kingdom.

This was a military ship actively used for desert transport of supplies during the Ranbal War. However, most of these ships had been retired from active duty, leaving only seven ships bearing the empty name of Desert Fleet.

Bringing a cloud of dust and sand and bearing the Holy Kingdom's flag, the sand ship stopped near the camp.

On the ship was a cardinal from Des Esseintes, the supreme governing council of the Holy Kingdom, and eight members of the Sacred Spirit Knights tasked as bodyguards— On the sand in front of the ship, Lurie Lizaldia greeted the cardinal.

"Later than expected, Millennia—"

"Fine-tuning that thing used up too much time. It turned three militarized spirits into charcoal as soon as it awakened."

Walking down the gangway was an adorable young girl dressed in vestments of pure white.

She looked thirteen or fourteen in age. Particularly striking was her glittering blonde hair, skin as pale and smooth as porcelain, and clear violet eyes. However, out of place on this adorable girl's appearance was a simple eye patch on her left eye.

This was Millennia Sanctus—Thirteenth of Des Esseintes.

Although her rank was not very high in the council's internal hierarchy, she had intimate ties to the military leadership. Even within the secretive Des Esseintes, she exuded a particularly eerie presence.

"You seem to have run into trouble of your own."

"An annoying barrier. Also, there's the Sphinx."

Lurie shrugged lightly. In terms of hierarchy, a cardinal of Des Esseintes ought to rank higher than Lurie, a guest general, but there was an air between them like that of intimate friends.





"Dear me, shouldn't dispelling the barrier be all too easy for you?"

"It's quite a special barrier. Existing in a minor dimensional distortion between the human realm and Astral Zero, the entire Demon King's Capital has been anchored there spatially and temporally."

In the past, the burial chamber where the Demon King's spirits had been sealed had appeared underground at Areishia Spirit Academy. This barrier probably had similar properties.

It posed a challenge even for Lurie, who specialized in barrier magic.

"So I see—"

Millennia Sanctus looked across the scorching desert.

Suddenly, her rosebud-like lips bloomed with joy.

"*She* is right there—"

"...?"

"My older sister—no, younger sister? I sense her. *After all, she and I are cut from the same cloth.*"

"Could it be that Ren Ashbell is here?"

"Unmistakable. How did they come across clues to the Tomb, I wonder?"

With her finger to her lip, Millennia smiled.

"...Looks like I get to fight that boy again."

Lurie Lizaldia showed a dark glimmer in her eyes.

"Now that is something to look forward to. Ren Ashbell the Strongest Blade Dancer versus *the winner of the Blade Dance fifteen years ago*—If both sides were to go all out, who would win?"

"—You know the answer already."

Saying that, Lurie looked towards the ship.

"Has the Lord fully awakened? Looks like the original schedule had to be rushed."

"No, half-awakened at best."

"Will that pose a problem?"

"It is enough to crack open the barrier."

Millennia swung her staff with a chuckle, causing it to ring.

The ship's side opened. The Sacred Spirit Knights began to lower a large box using a rope.

A metallic box of pure white. The shape was reminiscent of a coffin.

Led by Luminaris, the paladins all showed nervous expressions.

At the Sacred Capital's laboratory facility, the entity sleeping in this coffin had incinerated militarized spirits into charcoal in a flash.

Millennia Sanctus gently touched the edge of the coffin.

Then she recited words of summoning used by Queens.

"La ura me aluara shin, erul ragna volcas— ig alusiagi im, ys areisia—"

Meaning "the great tyrant, present in eternal conflagration, transcending the logic of good and evil, the executor of judgment," this was High Ancient that only very few humans understood.

In the distant past, these *words of power* had been lost during the era of the Spirit War—

"—Firg fomalhaut volcanicus."

The instant the incantation finished with words meaning "the incarnation of all flames on this plane"...

The coffin's lid instantly glowed red-hot and crimson flames surged forth.

The astounding heat, which felt like it would burn all the flesh from one's body, caused the surrounding knights to back away.

Next—

Out of the blazing crimson flames—*That* made its appearance.

Namely—

A girl dressed in a vivid dress of scarlet.

Her long crimson hair reached waist length. Her eyes were like rubies with brilliant flames dwelling within them.

On her head were two curling horns.

As exquisite as artwork made of glass, there was an air of fragility to her body.

Enveloped in flames, the girl swept her gaze across the knights surrounding her with a cold inorganic expression on her face.

Then her voice displeasure.

"Are you the ones who dare to disturb my sleep?"

Thus she spoke.

# Chapter 7 - The Demon King's Tomb

## Part 1

Feeling like he had been pranked by spirit...

Kamito finished checking in at the front desk and entered his hotel room.

It was simple and tidy room with a bed by the window and a small shelf for keeping valuables. The room area was not large, but for a commoner's accommodations, at least the bedsheets were clean and the floor had been perfectly swept. Even pampered daughters of nobility like Claire and the girls would not have complaints, probably.

(...What the heck is up with that man?) Obviously, he was no ordinary merchant. However, Kamito found it hard to imagine him as a spirit either. The man was probably not a high-level spirit manifesting in human form.

(...An elementalist?)

—No way. Even more impossible.

In theory, Kamito was the only male elementalist. Oh well, it was possible there were imitation Demon Kings like Jio Inzagi whom he had fought before—There was so much more to think about.

Who was it, and with what intention, that made this Demon King's Capital, which had been destroyed a thousand years ago, appear?

Princess Saladia's whereabouts. The purpose with which the Holy Kingdom had sent knights to the desert border.

Also—

Kamito looked out the window.

In his field of vision, the gigantic pyramid loomed no matter where he looked out in the streets.

(...I knew it, my only choice is to try barging it, I guess?) Putting his luggage on the ground, Kamito called to the sacred sword in his hand.

"Est, are you awake?"

'Yes, Kamito—'

Est made her blade glow in response. Kamito then said to her: "Let's go on a date next."

'...!?'

## Part 2

Having said that, Kamito left the hotel with Est.

Normally, Est would remain in sword form when Kamito took her out to the Academy town to do shopping and other things, but today, Kamito asked her to stay in human form. Compared to wandering the streets with a sword, walking with a girl would be less likely to arouse suspicions, probably.

Also, there were the dreams Est was having lately.

Kamito wanted to take her for a walk in the streets for a change of pace.

"Kamito is truly the Demon King of the Night... Demon King indeed."

"Wait a sec, I was just exaggerating when I called it a date."

To avoid getting separated in the heavy crowds, Kamito was holding Est's hand tightly.

...From an observer's point of view, the two of them probably looked more like lovers on a date than a contracted spirit with her elementalist.

Or perhaps, a pair of siblings who were close. No, or maybe— (...A pedophile with a young girl in tow, I hope not?) Girls around firesides looked at Kamito while whispering in lowered voices. Surely they must be praising how cute Est was... He prayed that was the case.

"But it has been such a long time since I went out with you like this."

"Yeah, that's right..."

Back at the Academy, Kamito would take walks with Est in the Academy town on holidays. But ever since the Blade Dance began, the days had gone by so busily. Finding such an opportunity was not easy at all.

As soon as the Blade Dance ended, Kamito had lost his memories and Est had ended up in a sealed state. When returning to the Academy from Laurenfrost,

he had Restia on his other arm. It really had been so long since he last took a leisurely stroll with Est, just the two of them, like this.





"Kamito, what is that?"

"It's a snake charmer act. I know how to perform similar acts too."

"Such as?"

"Knife throwing. It's a required course at the Instructional School."

Est seemed quite happy to Kamito. He wondered whether it was she enjoyed the rare hustle and bustle in the streets. Although to others' eyes, she might be expressionless as usual, Kamito could tell.

"By the way—"

Looking around the noisy plaza, Kamito muttered quietly.

"...This feels different from the Demon King's Capital I imagined."

Although he did not think it would be one of those sinister demon cities surrounded by bramble forests, as told in ancient fairy tales, never did he expect it to be such a prosperous city. Let alone Mordis or Zohar, this level of prosperity rivalled that of Ordesia's imperial capital.

Also, people's facial expressions were very cheerful. One could not see any fear from living under a Demon King's tyranny at all.

"...to, Kamito—"

"Hmm?"

Feeling a tug on his sleeve, Kamito looked back...

Only to see violet eyes gazing intently at him.

"Kamito, I am hungry."

"Oh right, come to think of it, you've been sleeping until now."

The ultimate sword spirit's only weakness was excessive power consumption. Spirits originally had no need to eat like humans, but Est's situation was special. Due to the incompleteness of their contract, she had to rely on eating to some degree in order to replenish divine power.

"Okay... How about we find a place to eat?"

Wondering if there were any shops selling food nearby, Kamito looked

around.

At that moment, Est pointed to the very center of the plaza.

"Kamito, look over there—"

Her two violet eyes were glimmering.

He followed her gaze, only to see a crowd gathered in front of a certain open-air stall.

A brawny man kept rotating a large piece of meat on a skewer, roasting it.

This was the kebab, a famous dish from the desert region. The shopkeeper would serve it by slicing off pieces of meat as necessary to roll up in a flatbread together with plenty of vegetables.

"Looks quite tasty."

The roasted meat's aroma was entering their nostrils, stimulating their appetite.

Est's eyes were glued firmly to the rotating meat.

Kamito smiled wryly then handed some money to the shopkeeper and bought a kebab. He had obtained the money earlier by exchanging with the mysterious merchant.

"This is very delicious, Kamito."

Holding the kebab in both hands, Est took bite after bite, eating expressionlessly.

"Glad you like it."

Seeing Est's contentment in her expressionless face, Kamito felt relieved.

Next, they walked towards the pyramid.

The Demon King's Capital was apparently built centered on the pyramid.

(I remember Restia saying that the location was originally the Demon King's palace—) Suddenly curious, Kamito turned his attention to the spirit seal on his left hand.

The link was still intact, but starting earlier, there had been no signs that she

would heed his summons.

Sigh, in Restia's case, this was quite usual all along— "Kamito—"

At this moment, Est gripped his hand tightly.

"Yeah, what's the matter?"

"Right now, you are on a date with me, Kamito."

It looked like she had noticed Kamito turning his attention to Restia.

*...I can't believe she declared a monopoly.*

"...Est."

Facing Est who kept staring at him unerringly, Kamito could not help but smile wryly.

"Fine, I'll focus only on you right now."

He gently gripped the cold little hand in return.

"Then let's do something a bit more date-like—"

Muttering, Kamito looked through the bazaars on the street and walked to a stall selling accessories.

It was a small shop selling items crafted from jewels and spirit crystals, amulets, etc laid out on a rug.

"...Est, which one do you want?"

"...?"

"It's a gift for you."

Kamito explained a little bashfully.

"It's so rare for me to buy this kind of thing for Est."

After all, she was capable of recreating any object after seeing it, be it clothing or other stuff. As a result, Kamito normally bought her food or local souvenirs instead of accessories.

Hearing that, Est widened her eyes.

"I am so happy, Kamito."

She said quietly.

"Kamito, please choose one that suits me. I will cherish it."

"You'll be happy if I chose it?"

"Yes, Kamito. Your wish is my command."

"Hmm, one that suits you, huh..."

The first thing that came to mind was ultimately kneesocks.

...But they probably did not sell kneesocks here.

"I will be happy as long you are the one who chose it, Kamito."

"T-Then... How about this?"

Saying that, Kamito picked up a small ring with a sword motif on it. He thought this type of simple design would suit Est better than extravagant jewelry with gemstones.

He handed the ring over to Est who expressionlessly held it, examining it.

Then she placed the ring onto her ring finger, the finger that had symbolized the spirit contract since ancient times.

"...Uh, do you like it?"

"Kamito—"

Est looked up towards Kamito's face.

"Kamito, I will always be your contracted spirit, forever and ever."

She spoke expressionlessly as always.

## Part 3

"Are you the ones who disturbed my sleep?"

The crimson-haired girl looked down at the paladins kneeling before her.

A frightful heat wave was scorching the air. Confronted with the overwhelming presence exuding from the girl's entire body, not only the Sacred Spirit Knights led by Luminaris but even Lurie too was holding her breath.

(She is a Lord after all, even in a half-awakened state...) Fifteen years ago, Lurie had been granted an audience with the beings known as the Lords. The extreme terror she had experienced back then was returning vividly to her now.

"Lord, we have awakened you in accordance to the covenant with my master."

Saying that, Millennia Sanctus knelt and bowed to the girl.

"Hmm—"

The girl addressed as "lord" exhaled with displeasure.

"Covenant, huh? Indeed, I have exchanged a covenant with that lord."

Saying that, she slowly surveyed the scenery around her.

"Where is this?"

"This is Ghul-a-val. A land formerly known as the Zoldia Kingdom—"

"I do not recall such matters."

"Because you have lost your memory, Lord."

"—Is that so? I see."

The girl spoke with irritation.

"And so, what is it that you petition for?"

"We wish to borrow your power, Lord, to *incinerate* a barrier—"

"Oh? A barrier—"

Apparently noticing something, the girl turned her gaze to the distance in the desert.

In the depths of her ruby-like eyes, the brilliant flames wavered slightly.

"A dimensional crevice, huh? It is rare to see one so large."

"Can you destroy it?"

"—Foolish question. Do you mean to put me to a test?"

"I wouldn't dare."

Millennia smiled and shook her head calmly.

"A crafty *hybrid*."

Murmuring, the girl slowly extended her hand towards the far side of the desert.

Next—

"Dance, the crimson flames summoning destruction—Hell Blaze."

A brilliant red glow appeared in the middle of her palm.

The contracted ball of conflagration shot out as a flash of light.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A gigantic explosion resulted, rivaling a meteor impact.

The wind from the blast swept through the surroundings, gouging the ground of red sand.

Like an earthquake, the rumbling resounded all around. The paladins all went pale.

"Th-This is what had... turned the land of Elstein into a sea of fire, the Lord's... flames—"

These words leaked out from Luminaris, leader of the knights, who was out of breath.

But she was not completely right. This girl was not a complete Lord.

At most, she was an avatar in the human realm, a manifestation of the Lord separated from the main body.

Volcanicus—The Elemental Lord ruling over the fire element in this world.

For a mere avatar to possess such power—

The blazing flames of spirit magic disappeared into Astral Zero.

Once the flames had subsided—

The Demon King's Capital, shimmering like a mirage, made its appearance.



## Part 4

The interior of Quseir Amra was as complicated as a maze due to continual disorganized expansion.

Led by a female attendant, Claire and the girls finally arrived at a public bath located in a different block.

Areishia Spirit Academy's purification facilities were essentially undecorated, contributing to an atmosphere of serenity. Here, the public bath was decorated with colorful flowers with beautiful natural scenery painted on the walls.

"...What a beautiful place for purification. It reminds me a lot of the Elstein hot springs."

Using a towel to cover her still developing chest, Claire could not help but exclaim in admiration.

The bathing area, filled with steam, featured six gigantic tubs built from stone. Several young princess maidens were enjoying a soak in there. Mainstream purification facilities in the Theocracy tended to be sauna-style, using steam for body cleansing, but here, it looked like bathing was method.

"So they use fire spirit crystals for heating water."

"Just like the hot spring at Laurenfrost."

Rinslet dipped her finger into a tub.

"However, this is odd."

Fianna cocked her head and commented.

"How so?"

"After all, this is Ghul-a-val, the land forsaken by the spirits. But this places can use spirit crystals to heat such a large tub in a stable manner—"

"Now that you mention it, you are right..."

If spirit mechanisms could operate stably in the desert, there would be no need for them to ride that old and battered sand ship here.

"Sure enough, this city is affected by an extraordinary power..."

"Well, putting that aside, let us bathe first."

"I agree."

The young ladies unwrapped their towels and headed to the purification showers.

"...Hwah~ I knew it, hot springs are the best. It's more effective than just a simple bath."

After rinsing themselves at the showers, washing away the sand stuck to their hair, Claire and the girls dipped themselves in the largest tub, filled with cloudy hot water.

Soaked in hot water up to their shoulders, they instantly felt their entire body relax.

"Hmm, it felt like the sand bath did not replenish much divine power. Perhaps because we were in Ghul-a-val..."

Untying her ponytail, Ellis partially closed her eyes in comfort.

"Say, Ellis... Did your boobs grow even larger?"

Saying that, Claire stared at Ellis' chest.

"...! W-What are you talking about!? N-No such thing... I think..."

Ellis went red with embarrassment, stammering. In fact, she recently started to feel that her Sylphid Knights armor was getting a bit tight.

"Oh my, Claire has gotten bigger too, just a tiny bit."

"Hya!"

Fianna pounced on Claire from behind, grabbing her chest, causing Claire to scream adorably.

"...W-W-What, w-what are you doing, you perverted princess!?"

"Dear me, did I guess correctly?"

"Hmph, the bust-upping technique I taught her has finally shown results, I see."

"...~~~~~!"

Claire's crimson hair began to ignite, raising the water temperature all at once.

"S-So hot...!"



"This is a public bath, remember!"

Rinslet hastily chanted spirit magic, dumping chunks of ice into the bath tub.

Presumably hearing a commotion, maidens in charge of massage services rushed over next, politely speaking in a foreign tongue to remind Claire's group to behave.

...Ignoring their masters' commotion, the contracted spirits were enjoying their break on the side.

Afraid of water, Scarlet was lying on a spirit crystal that had been heated red-hot, licking the spewing flames with her tongue. Simorgh was perched on a deciduous plant with wings outspread. Swimming in a tub, Fenrir was popular with princess maidens of other affiliations.

Georgios' steel affinity meant a particular weakness to steam, so instead of manifesting, he stayed in Astral Zero to rest.

"Mmmm~... This is paradise..."

Claire stretched like a cat while drinking complimentary rose-scented water. For Claire, who grew up as a sheltered daughter of nobility, a harsh desert journey was still quite tiring for her.

"Yes, we must thank that merchant."

When Rinslet replied quietly—

"..."

Claire and the others fell awkwardly silent.

"...W-What is the matter?"

"Actually, about that—"

Ellis spoke seriously.

"Was everything the merchant said actually true?"

"Yeah—"

Next, Claire nodded with a solemn expression.

"Although he doesn't look like a bad guy, I think it's dangerous to take his

word completely. He said he's a merchant from Zohar, but I really doubt the truth of that."

Putting aside whether the kind Rinslet believed or not— Claire and the others found the merchant quite suspicious.

The Sphinx that had appeared in the desert, this guardian spirit should have been tasked with determining whether a visitor was worthy of entering the Demon King's Capital.

Would it really help a mere collapsed merchant?

"I remember he said there were others brought here apart from himself. In any case, we should ask those people first—"

"...Assuming he was speaking the truth about that."

In response to Fianna's suggestion, Claire shrugged and replied.

"B-By the way..."

At this moment, Ellis spoke with hesitation.

"What's the matter, Ellis?"

"Umm, it dawned upon me once again just now... I-I am still afraid of dealing with m-men."

"Y-Yes... I get it too."

"Yes... I can sympathize."

...Hearing Ellis' honest comment, Claire and Rinslet nodded.

Although spending their days with Kamito had helped them adjust somewhat — They were sheltered young ladies at the core.

"Hmm, yet of all people, you're not afraid of Kamito-kun?"

Fianna pinched Ellis' arm.

"K-Kamito is special... Wait, w-what are you making me say!?"

Ellis turned bright red in the face, steam rising from her head.

"...Good grief, be more honest."

While wringing her wet hair dry, Fianna spoke with exasperation.

"...~Then Your Highness, what do you feel about..."

"About what?"

"...That is, uh... A-About Kamito... What do you feel—"

With Fianna staring straight at her, Ellis stammered ambiguously in contrast to her usual style of stern dignity.

Seeing that, Fianna sighed and shrugged mildly, Then...

"—I love Kamito-kun."

She said it simply.

"Y-Your Highness!?"

Ellis widened her brown eyes. Claire and Rinslet also felt their hearts beating hard.

Fianna also turned her gaze to the two of them, blushing while blowing bubbles on the water surface.

"...How exactly do all of you feel?"

"...I-I... uh... feel positive, a-about Kamito..."

"M-Me too... Uh, umm..."

Rinslet seemed particularly concerned and looked at Claire.

Claire was blushing intensely, her mouth opening and shutting.

"I-It's not like I... I...love—"

"Love?"

"...~~~~! O-Ooooooh... F-Fine, I'll say it!"

Claire cried out with almost complete resignation.

"I love Kami—"

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

At that instant, a thunderous explosion was heard and the public bath shook violently.

"W-What the heck!?"

"What is going on!?"



# Chapter 8 - The Queen of the Demon King City

## Part 1

"—Say, this place is crazy huge."

This was the first thing Kamito said.

Looking up from the base, he realized the pyramid was much bigger than he had imagined. Its size with put it on the same scale as Nefescal Palace in the Ordesia Empire.

The pyramid was surrounded by a large garden, which served as evidence to support what Restia had said—This used to be the location of a palace.

This raised the question, who was in charge of maintaining the garden? Keeping such a huge garden in good condition should require substantial manpower. Or perhaps the plants in this Demon King's Capital did not grow?

"The material... Metal?"

Touching the wall of pure white, Kamito felt a cold texture.

It did not feel like stone or tiles, at least.

(...That Zohar merchant said there was no entrance.) Kamito walked around in the surroundings, but let alone an entrance, he could not even find a single crack in the wall.

Although he could not be certain unless he went a full revolution around the perimeter, but the lack of an entrance was probably true.

"Okay, what should I do then...?"

Confronted with this excessively huge building, Kamito did not know how to approach the problem at all. The last time he felt this lost was when Greyworth sent him to tidy and clean a massive mansion.

However, there should be no mistake that this pyramid was the Demon King's Tomb.

"Is there a password...? Or certain conditions need to be met in order to enter?"

Kamito had wondered if the Sphinx might reappear to test him for worthiness to enter the Tomb. However, this guess evidently was off the mark.

(...It'd save so much work if the Sphinx came.) Thinking that, Kamito turned to Est.

"Est, can you *take care* of this?"

"Yes, I am your beloved sword, Kamito. As such, there is nothing in the world that I cannot cut open."

"What's with this reasoning that I can't understand... Anyway, might as well give it a try."

"Leave it to me."

Est puffed her chest out slightly and nodded.

Hence, Kamito held Est's hand and poured divine power into her.

"Dispassionate Queen of Steel, the sacred sword that destroys evil— Now form a sword of steel and be the power in my hand!"

Est's body immediately vanished into thin air. At the same time, the Demon Slayer appeared in Kamito's hand.

'—Kamito, allow me to demonstrate my power of demon slaying to you right now.'

Even though he had not poured much divine power into the sword, the silver-white blade was glowing brilliantly.

...Est seemed to be in a good mood today.

"Then let's go—"

Kamito took a step towards the wall.

"Haaaaaaah!"

He mustered his strength and swung the Demon Slayer forcefully.

Claaaaaaang!

With an ear-splitting sound—

Est's blade, glowing silver-white, sliced into the pyramid's wall.

(Great!)

The attack worked. At least this was not indestructible.

'How is that, Kamito?'

Est's voice sounded a little proud.

"Yeah, that's my Est... Hmm, eh?"

At this moment, Kamito noticed something.

"E-Est... Y-You're stuck!"

'...!?'

With half its blade embedded in the wall, the sacred sword could not budge the slightest.

"I-I hope we're not in trouble..."

'...Kamito, save me.'

In a rare moment, Est's voice sounded a little anxious for once.

"H-Hold on, I'll pull you out right away... Here, heave ho!"

Kamito placed one foot on the wall and pushed hard, mustering his entire body's strength to pull the sacred sword out.

At that moment, his foot on the wall suddenly lost its footing.

(...Huh?)

Before he could savor this sense of dissonance...

"...! Uwahhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Suddenly, the wall cracked open to reveal a hole. Kamito fell as though being sucked in.

## Part 2

"—! Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Swallowed by the pitch-black vertical hole, too deep to fathom, Kamito kept falling.

The wind rushed past his ears. The air pressure was making Kamito breathless.

(...! I'm in big trouble now!)

Unlike last time when falling down an ice valley in Laurenfrost...

Even if he wanted to use his sword to slow down, there were no walls around him to stab at the moment.

(Releasing divine power is possible to slow my descent—) But doing that would only delay the inevitable.

(...Tsk, what should I do!?)

'Kamito, please summon the darkness spirit—'

"...! R-Right—!"

Kamito raised his left hand and poured divine power into it.

"—Come, Restia!"

The spirit seal on his left hand, featuring a moon crest, glowed brilliantly in the darkness.

"..."

...However, there were no signs that the gate of summoning would open.

(...Gah, th-that selfish spirit!)

Kamito shouted in his heart.

On further thought, she had been absent from his side at every critical moment. For example, three years ago, during Greyworth's training when an archdemon-class spirit was chasing him, she was in Astral Zero, enjoying snacks while taking a leisurely break.

However, there was no time for complaining right now. Although Kamito had no idea where this hole led, if he fell to the bottom like this, surely what awaited him was...

(...Crap, this might be the end of me.) Just as he thought that— "...!?"

Suddenly, his body floated up lightly.

"...W-What's going on?"

His weight seemed to vanish all of a sudden.

Floating in the darkness, Kamito slowly descended.

"...I-I'm saved...?"

Slowly descending in the bottomless darkness— After a while, Kamito's feet finally touched the ground.

"..."

Silence all around. Apart from his own noise, he could not hear any other sound.

Kamito took a breath then had Est's blade glow.

The brilliant light from the silver-white blade instantly lit up the surroundings.

Kamito had expected to be surrounded by inorganic metal— "...! What is this place!?"

But illuminated by the sacred sword's light, what entered his view was— A scene completely different from Kamito's imagination.

Before him was a ceiling with countless spirit crystals embedded and a huge temple hall. Heavy stone columns lined the center while intricate relief sculptures were carved on the walls.

It did not look like a "tomb" from a thousand years ago at all.

The impression was like a king's palace.

'—Kamito, *I know this place.*'

Est's blade flashed.

"...Est, don't tell me you regained your memory?"

'No, I did not. But this place is—'

"—The Great Temple of the Celestial Demon. A thousand years ago, this was where the Demon King and the Sacred Maiden had their final battle."

"...!?"

Hearing the voice coming from above...

Kamito jerked his head up.

With jet-black feathers floating down, a girl in a night-colored dress appeared out of thin air.

"Restia—!"

Kamito exclaimed in surprise as the darkness spirit girl slowly descended in front of him.

"Kamito, did you enjoy sightseeing outside?"

"...Come on, I called you so many times."

Kamito glared at her.

"In that case, my apologies. Inside this Tomb, connections to the outside world are not very smooth. However, I did hear your calls just now."

"If that's the case, you should've come as soon as possible."

"After all, I knew you wouldn't fall to the very bottom. Was it exciting?"

Seeing Restia's adorable smile, Kamito sighed.

"...So, what is this place? The extravagant decoration doesn't look like a tomb —"

"This is the Demon King's palace. Or more precisely, this is a place reconstructed with the palace as the model."

Looking up at the Great Temple's ceiling, she explained.





"Are there any differences?"

"The real palace is long gone. This is only a place *she* created inside the Demon King's Tomb, modeled on the original palace."

"—*She*?"

Kamito asked.

"Yes, the master of this Demon King's Tomb."

"What?"

Restia chuckled then looked towards a door that led to the depths of the hall.

"Follow me, Kamito. The Queen of the Demon King City wishes to meet you."

## Part 3

"...Say, are we there yet, Restia?"

"Almost—"

While using the sacred sword's blade for illumination— Kamito walked along what seemed to be an endless corridor.

The master who had invited Kamito into the Tomb was apparently located in the deepest part of this pyramid.

What kind of being was the ruler of this city?

Restia had used "she" to refer to the ruler— After walking for another ten minutes or so, a stone gate appeared before them.

Embedded in the center of the gate was a large spirit crystal. Restia placed her hand on top and the gate slowly opened, its two doors opening to the sides.

Inside the gate was darkness.

"Here, Kamito."

"Is it safe to go in?"

Kamito asked a little nervously. Restia nodded silently.

Lowering the faintly glowing sacred sword's blade, Kamito slowly stepped in.

Instantly—

"—I have waited a long time for you, Demon King's successor."

"...!?"

He heard a voice, as clear as glass. A blinding light then appeared.

Kamito could not help but block the light with his hand.

What appeared overhead of Kamito was— A transparent crystal pillar was

hovering amid darkness in the air above.

The pillar shone with iridescence, spinning slowly.

"Is this actually a spirit crystal?"

Kamito widened his eyes, exclaiming in surprise.

The iridescent glowing crystal was undoubtedly a single spirit crystal.

However, the largest spirit crystal ever unearthed on the entire continent was small enough to hold in two hands. This kind of pillar could not possibly exist.

Kamito was stunned, his entire body frozen— Soon, there was a change in the iridescence.

In the center of the transparent crystal, a figure appeared.

(...What?)

Kamito focused his eyes on the iridescent glow.

Only to see, emerging from the light— A beautiful woman, her complexion as white as snow, wearing a dress of thin fabric.

She looked slightly older than Kamito. Her pale and beautiful face was framed by a head of green hair evocative of emerald.

Her eyes were as red as blood. The graceful lines of her ears ended in a pointed shape.

Her beauty, sacred and inviolable, made Kamito hold his breath.

"...A spirit?"

He muttered, but no sooner had he spoken, he realized how stupid his words were.

—A being of this sort could only be a spirit.

This was the sixth completely humanoid spirit that Kamito had encountered.

Est. Restia. Iseria Seaward, the Water Elemental Lord's incarnation whom they had met on Ragna Ys. Scarlet's true form, Ortlinde. Finally, there was Bahamut, Dracunia's Dragon King. Each and every one of them was a top-tier spirit with immense power.

In that case, the spirit in front of him right now too— Inside the shining crystal, her lips moved gently.

"—Demon King's successor. I have been waiting all along for your arrival."

Her voice was as tender as a mother's, yet as innocent as a young maiden's at the same time.

Hearing this voice, which plucked at one's heartstrings, Kamito involuntarily lowered his guard.

"...Waiting for me?"

He asked honestly.

"Yes, in this Tomb, for a thousand years—"

"A-A thousand years...?"

What on earth was she talking about?

Kamito turned his head back to look at Restia behind him.

"...Uh, could you explain in simpler terms?"

He asked for help.

"...Say, do you two know each other?"

"Know—I suppose it counts, if it's to the extent of knowing."

Restia tilted her head, somewhat perplexed.

"That sounds so vague."

"Yes. In fact, she and I had never exchanged many words."

"Huh..."

"—There was no helping it."

Just then, the spirit in the crystal spoke.

"After all, she was the most excellent of weapons employed by *him*, spending the majority of her time on the battlefield. In contrast, I was the opposite, staying in this palace always—"

"...Him?"

"Demon King Solomon."

Hearing Kamito's question, Restia replied.

"...What!?"

Hearing that, Kamito widened his eyes. Restia shrugged and drew near to his ear.

"Didn't I mention it at Mordis? The one and only spirit who had formed a contract with Demon King Solomon—"

"Oh..."

Kamito remembered.

Before setting off on the ship, he had definitely heard her mention it.

"Then she's—"

"Yes, indeed. She is the spirit Iris. The Queen of the Demon King City, watching over this Demon King's Tomb for a thousand years all this time."

## Part 4

"The spirit Iris—"

The only spirit trusted by Demon King Solomon, forming a spirit contract with him— (...So that's her?)

Kamito stared intently at the spirit crystal floating in the air.

The spirit referred to as Iris simply smiled calmly, gazing downwards at Kamito.

"...Wait a sec. I remember you telling me that the spirit disappeared somewhere in Astral Zero after the Demon King's death, right?"

"Yes. That was what I honestly believed."

Restia nodded.

"However, I was wrong. She neither stayed in the human realm nor went to Astral Zero. Instead, she stayed here, watching over the Demon King's Tomb—"

"In that case..."

Saying that, Kamito took a breath then asked the spirit in the crystal.

"Are you the one who created this Demon King's Capital? Uh, and the residents here..."

If that were true—

Her power would rival that of the Elemental Lords.

But—

"No. The city was not created by my power."

The Queen of the Demon King City shook her head slowly.

"This city is a memory fragment, anchored to a gap between the human realm and Astral Zero by the Demon King's power. I am simply using the Tomb's

power to maintain the status quo."

"...Memory fragment?"

The term used by the queen made Kamito especially curious.

...Coincidence? He remembered the merchant of Zohar saying the same thing.

"The truth of the Demon King's Capital consists of the Demon King's memories from a thousand years ago, anchored in a dimensional gap. And the pyramid is a gigantic magic device for maintaining the city, right?"

"Yes, this city, the people living here, I included... are all akin to illusions, only capable of existing in a dimensional gap."

"...I'll be frank. I don't understand anything about magic."

Kamito spoke while scratching his head.

If Fianna were here, she probably could give him a detailed explanation.

"This city is a legacy of the Demon King who was vanquished a thousand years ago. And you're the one maintaining this city, is that right?"

"Essentially. This understanding is correct."

The city's residents, disappearing when they exited the city walls, no different from living humans in appearance, were actually created according to the Demon King's memories.

Also, this place was apparently not the human realm familiar to Kamito.

Demon King Solomon's contracted spirit.

For as long as a thousand years, she had kept watch over the Demon King's coffin and his memories.

Was it out of loyalty to the Demon King, or perhaps— Thinking that, Kamito noticed he had not asked about the key point.

"So why have you invited you here, my queen?"

Logically speaking, she would not want anyone to know of the existence of this Demon King City.

However, the Sphinx had judged Kamito's worthiness, then led him to this



dimensional gap.

For what purpose?

"Because there are matters I must convey to his successor."

The queen spoke.

"You have things to tell me?"

"Yes. I simply wish to convey the truth to you. I hope you will not make the same mistake as he did—"

(...Mistake?)

Kamito wondered in his mind.

What mistake was she talking about as the Demon King's contracted spirit?

"Please touch the crystal, Kazehaya Kamito."

Just then, the queen called out Kamito's name for the first time.

"Don't worry, it's only temporary, to synchronize your minds together."

Kamito looked at Restia.

Restia gave him a light nod.

"..."

After some brief hesitation, Kamito slowly reached up above his head.

To be honest, he was still a bit on guard— But he chose to trust Restia's judgment.

When his fingertips touched the crystal's surface the iridescent light instantly glowed brighter.

(...!?)

At that moment, Kamito's view turned pure white.

At the same time, massive memories rushed into his mind.

(This is...!)

"Please understand. What exactly happened a thousand years ago—"

The spirit Iris' voice echoed in his ear—  
Kamito's consciousness then flew far away.

## Part 5

A thousand years ago—

Back when Ghul-a-val was still a place of fertile land.

A boy was born in a small village near the Zodia Kingdom's border.

"The boy's name was Solomon Yelsion. Although male, he was able to use spirits just as princess maidens could—"

Images of the boy employing all kinds of spirits appeared in Kamito's view.

The images were not clear, but Kamito could see that the boy was similar to him in age. He had long black hair. Quite tall. He seemed more strongly built than Kamito.

(...So this is Demon King Solomon?)

Kamito stared intently at the image.

Possibly because he had seen himself wearing that skull mask at Mordis, Kamito's image of the Demon King did not match this boy at all.

"He was a kind-hearted young man both wise and brave. He never used spirits for personal desires. Instead, he used his power to fight magic beasts and spirits that threatened humans—"

The images projected in Kamito's mind kept changing like flowing water.

The young man saved human villages, vanquished malicious spirits, and protected his country from greedy conquerors.

Finally, he began to be known as a hero, obtaining status only second to the king. Commending him on his achievements, the king even gave his only daughter's hand in marriage to him.

The people of the kingdom praised the hero, hoping for him to become the next king.

So long as the hero Solomon lived, the kingdom's prosperity would continue. That was what everyone believed.

However—

"Some people were jealous of his exploits and felt deeply offended. They were retainers and generals who had served the kingdom since antiquity, as well as elders of the princess maidens who commanded spirits—"

(...All too natural.)

Kamito silently muttered in his thoughts.

Whether a thousand years ago or now, human nature was not much different. The coup d'etats occurring Ordesia and the Theocracy earlier were proof of that.

"They used all kinds of underhanded plots, trying to bring down the hero, hoping to uncover his crimes. However, they did not succeed. Because they could not find a single flaw in the noble and virtuous hero—"

The king's retainers fabricated unfavorable reports about the hero, but their plans were foiled one after another by the hero's own actions and behavior. Someone even tried to send assassins to kill the hero, but they soon realized it was futile. The hero Solomon was protected by the blessing of spirits at all times.

In the end, the villains' nefarious schemes were exposed to the king.

"Enraged with his scheming retainers, the king ordered them to be sent to spirits as live sacrifices. However, Solomon pleaded with the king to be lenient. Thus, the villains' lives were saved by the hero they hated."

The hero generously forgave them. No one never made mistakes. Everyone had times of mental weakness. He hoped they could all work together for the kingdom's prosperity, that was what he said— "The people who tried to harm him felt deeply ashamed and repented. However, a small minority hated him even more after this incident—"

These retainers acted repentant on the surface but secretly watched the hero eagerly in hopes of finding any misstep. Some people became the hero's loyal

subordinates while others maintained friendly ties with him.

Thus, a few years later, the chance they were waiting for finally arrived.

"Favored son of the spirits, Solomon Yelsion. Pure, virtuous and flawless, he who held the title of hero, committed a great taboo—"

Saying that, the queen sighed deeply.

"...Taboo?"

"He fell in love with a girl of the Elfim race, the kingdom's enemy—"

The scenery before Kamito's eyes changed.

Next to appear was an image of a forest maiden with green hair and crimson eyes.

"...An Elfim?"

"Apparently that is the name nowadays."

The spirit Iris smiled.

"They were early humans who migrated from Astral Zero during the ancient past. Their descendants were known as the Elves back then. A thousand years ago, the Elves allied with the spirits to oppose the human kingdom in order to protect the Primordial Forest."

Several battles had taken place between the Zodia Kingdom and the Elves. Although the Elves lacked numbers, the forest spirits wielded formidable powers, hence they were able to put up a stalwart resistance over many years.

The hero and the forest maiden fought many times on the battlefield— Over this process, they fell in love.

The girl had betrayed the forest village that had raised her, whereas Solomon had betrayed the kingdom.

Even though he had married the king's daughter, he still fell in love with an Elf and even had a child with her.

Find out this had happened, the villainous retainers were overjoyed and secretly reported to the king.

They claimed the hero was scheming with the Elves and was preparing to sell out the kingdom— "Hearing that the hero was a traitor, the king flew into a wild rage. Then he ordered his generals to set out on a punitive expedition to the Elven village where the forest maiden lived—"

A scene of the forest, burning in a crimson blaze, was played before Kamito's eyes.

Voices of the Elves, filled with sorrow and hatred, echoed in his ears.

"The village was burned down. The forest maiden and the hero's child... were killed."

That day, the young man formerly known as the hero turned into the incarnation of wrath.

He raised a manner of rebellion against the kingdom, fighting alongside the forest spirits.

Against the former hero who singlehandedly fought across many battlefields, the royal army fought a difficult campaign.

But after months of battle, in the end—

The hero fell into a trap and was arrested at last.

He was subjected to harsh torture. His throat was crushed, his entire body was stripped of the spirit seals, and his power completely taken away— Then in such a powerless state, he was dragged before the kingdom's people.

The populace, who used to praise him nonstop as a hero, used their same mouths to curse him and throw rocks at him.

At this time, the young man formerly known as the hero despaired for the first time, lamenting his own stupidity.

What was it that he had spent his life protecting?

On the execution platform, he turned to the heavens and cursed mankind.

"—At that moment, a voice responded to him."

"...A voice?"

Kamito suddenly an alarming thought, about the voice the Demon King had

heard. Was it the same voice that had called to Kamito before, the voice of the Darkness Elemental Lord?

But Restia had previously told Kamito at Mordis.

The Demon King I knew had not awakened the Darkness Elemental Lord's power— "—No, it was not the Darkness Elemental Lord's voice."

The queen refuted the idea.

"Huh?"

If the voice heard by the hero Solomon did not come from the Darkness Elemental Lord— Whose voice was it...?

"It was one of the Elemental Lords, rulers of this world, that made contact with him—"

The spirit Iris spoke the name in a whisper.

*Holy Lord Alexandros*—Leader of the Five Great Elemental Lords.

"...!?"

Hearing such unexpected words, Kamito gasped.

Alexandros.

The Lord of Light, considered the greatest out of all the Elemental Lords.

Also the Elemental Lord who was somehow absent when Kamito won the Blade Dance three years ago.

—That name, why did it come up now?

"The Holy Lord offered some sort of contract to him at the verge of death who had cursed the world—"

The spirit Iris continued.

"...Contract?"

"The Holy Lord told him that his beloved maiden could rise from the dead if he used the power of miracles beyond the human world. And that power would

also bring him strength—"

On the execution platform, the hero Solomon asked the voice.

'One who offers me temptation, what is the price?'

The Holy Lord answered him.

—Thou shalt become the Demon King to bring chaos and destruction to the world.

(...!?)

Kamito felt confused. Countless questions arose in his mind.

The Holy Lord should know that Solomon was the reincarnation of the enemy, Darkness Elemental Lord.

Why would an Elemental Lord, supposed to maintain order in the world, hope for chaos and the world's destruction?

"He formed a contract with the Holy Lord and accepted the miracle transcending the human world. What transpired afterwards is as recorded in history and passed to the present day—"

Having obtained the power of miracles, he slaughtered all the kingdom's people who were present.

Then he killed the king, killed the retainers, killed the princess who used to be his wife— Inside the incinerated palace of the Zoldia Kingdom, he gave a mighty roar.

Thus, the young elemental, formerly known as the hero—

He was reborn as the most terrifying Demon King in history.



## Part 6

—His view turned blank.

Kamito opened his eyes, only to see before him the crystal where the spirit Iris was sealed.

"—This is the truth that I hoped to convey, successor."

"..."

Kamito gently drew back his fingers from the crystal's surface and gazed at her face.

Green hair, reminiscent of the fresh verdure of forests. Crimson eyes, as red as blood.

The graceful lines of her ears were characteristic of *that race*.

"Looks like the Holy Lord kept his promise with the Demon King—"

With mixed feelings on his face, Kamito whispered.

He realized her true identity... In other words, *that* happened.

"Your guess is correct. The Holy Lord granted him the power of miracles and resurrected me. I lived again, but this time as an imperishable being that would never know death again—a spirit."

Resurrecting the dead—there was only one power in this world, capable of such a miracle.

—The boon awarded by the Elemental Lords, to each winner of the Blade Dance.

"—Having obtained power from the Holy Lord, lost in his hatred for the world, he launched a war that swept across the entire continent. I failed to stop it. His heart was already corrupted by destruction. All I could do was face destiny together with him, to accompany him until the end of his life as the Demon

King's one and only contracted spirit."

The Queen of the Demon King City looked squarely into Kamito's eyes and said.

"I only invited you here to tell you the truth. I hope you will not make the same mistake as him—"

Demon King Solomon was the young man formerly known as the hero.

But lost in hatred, he fell to become the one known as the Demon King.

...No one could guarantee that the same would not happen to Kamito.

Putting aside the incomprehensible Holy Lord for now— Kamito had almost gotten swallowed by the Darkness Elemental Lord's power on several occasions now.

"...I understand things now, but what should I do?"

Kamito asked the queen.

He did not think he would end up like Demon King Solomon, but— "—I have a suggestion, successor."

The spirit Iris replied calmly.

"Suggestion?"

"Have you ever thought about living here in this Demon King's Capital?"

"—Huh?"

Kamito involuntarily made a stupid sound.

"...Uh, what do you mean?"

...The leap of logic was too great. His mind could not keep up.

Living in this city?

"This is a dimensional gap isolated from both the human realm and Astral Zero. Neither the Elemental Lords nor your enemies should be able to find you here. In that case, there would be no need for you to fight. The Darkness Elemental Lord's power would not awaken and you shall be able to live in peace, at this eternal city where time repeats for perpetuity—"

"..."

After listening to Iris—

Kamito took a breath and looked towards Restia.

"Indeed, this could very well be the safest place on the continent. At the very least, it might be better than being on the run from the Ordesia Empire."

"...! Restia!?"

"I am just stating facts, Kamito. No matter where you go, be it to the ends of the world, I shall always stay by your side—"

Restia's dusk-colored eyes were gazing at Kamito.

"If it is your wish, the concubines you have brought could also live here too."

"...They're not my concubines."

Correcting the queen, Kamito looked down at his feet.

A place of serenity, where time was eternal.

Indeed, staying here might be safe. Whether the Darkness Elemental Lord or the Holy Kingdom, he could forget them all and live in peace.

That being said, Kamito had absolutely no wish to become the Demon King—  
...But suppose Claire or any of the girls in his company were to be killed in front of him?

To be honest, Kamito could not be sure he would be able to control himself then.

Then there was the fact that he had forsaken everything in the past for the sake of finding Restia— "I..."

Just as Kamito clenched his fist hard.

There was a noise from above. The pyramid shook slightly.

"...What the heck?"

"...! Could it be!?"

The spirit Iris exclaimed in shock.

"What happened?"

"—Intruders. Someone has destroyed the pyramid's barrier."

# Chapter 9 - Lurie Lizaldia

## Part 1

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A crimson blazing fireball struck the pyramid directly from the front.

This wall, which ordinary spirit magic could not harm in the slightest, instantly had a hole melted by the fire.

Residents of the Demon King City scattered and fled screaming. Even these virtual life forms created from the Demon King's memories felt fear— Sparks flying in the wind were reflected in the eyes of the girl standing in front of the Tomb.

The girl simply stared at the melted wall emotionlessly.

"—So this is the extent of my current power, I see."

The girl bowed her head, looking at her palm, murmuring calmly.

The Sacred Spirit Knights serving as bodyguards were watching her with terror on their faces.

To think she would dismiss her flames, capable of vaporizing militarized spirits in an instant, of being merely "this extent"— "Blowing away the Tomb would be a piece of cake if full power were recovered, I suppose."

Millennia Sanctus said.

Even though her words were slightly disrespectful towards a lord, the girl did not care.

"I have no interest in a tomb. Rather—"

Saying that, she looked to the streets in the opposite direction.

"I would like to have another look at a human city."

"Elemental Lord, you are interested in a human city?"

Luminaris could not help but interject her doubt.

"Is there anything wrong with that?"

"N-Not at all. Forgive my insolence!"

Luminaris' voice trembled as she hastily knelt on the ground.

The girl cast a cold glaze upon her then...

"I have fulfilled the covenant. Here on, I shall do as I please."

Saying that, she walked towards the plaza.

"...W-Will there be a problem, Cardinal!?"

With a panicking expression, Luminaris asked.

"Uh... L-Letting that kind of *monster* run loose like this—"

"She isn't that easy to control."

The one to reply was Lurie Lizaldia.

"Just let her do as she wants, since our master's covenant continues to restrain her, after all. Well, I suppose bodyguards ought to be arranged—or should I say, surveillance?"

"Understood...!"

Luminaris bowed, took a few subordinates with her and ran after the girl.

"Very well—"

Lurie turned around and stared at the hole melted in the Demon King's Tomb.

"The path is opened. Time to welcome the *sleeping princess*, Millennia."

## Part 2

"...Intruders?"

Kamito asked Iris. Ordinary attacks should not be able to breach the walls of this Demon King's Tomb— However, the Queen of the Demon King City stared at the ceiling gravely.

"A human elementalist. Also, the other one is... a spirit? No, incorrect... A being neither human nor spirit, is coming towards here."

"A being neither human nor spirit?"

"Yes, approaching a spirit in fundamental nature, but with an unfathomable side—"

"—Millennia Sanctus."

Just then, Restia spoke up.

"A cardinal of the Holy Kingdom's. At Dracunia, she tried to assassinate the Dragon King—"

"That girl huh..."

Memories from the attack on the Academy flashed through Kamito's mind.

Covered by an eye patch, her left eye contained Otherworldly Darkness capable of rendering Elemental Lords insane.

That girl definitely felt somehow different from ordinary spirits— "So the Holy Kingdom's knights have found this city?"

"Evidently."

"...No way, that is impossible!"

The spirit Iris' voice trembled.

"In theory, unless judged worthy by the Sphinx, other people should have no

way of reaching this place, let alone finding it—"

"But reality is that people have come. So that's that."

Kamito shrugged and said.

"Those people must have their eyes on the Demon King's coffin you are guarding."

"...!"

The queen widened her crimson eyes.

According to Rubia, the Holy Kingdom's knights had started exploring Ghul-a-val even before Princess Saladia made her way to the desert. In that case, their target probably was neither the princess nor Kamito's group, instead, it would be something hidden inside this Demon King's Tomb.

(But it's hard to imagine they'd really believe in a legend about the Demon King's power lying dormant in the coffin—) Looking at the ceiling, Kamito placed his hand on the hilt of the Demon Slayer.

Then staring into the queen's eyes, he said simply.

"That suggestion just now... Sorry, I have to refuse. Living here in peace might not be bad, but it looks like the situation won't allow me to do that."

In the end, he had to rely on himself to protect what he cared about and places he considered home.

That was precisely the basic tenet that Greyworth had imparted to him.

"I see."

The Queen of the Demon King City shook her head sorrowfully.

"How unfortunate. However, I cannot stop your decision. In fact, the peace of this city is being broken right before my eyes."

"Yes, the peace is broken."

Kamito responded.

"But don't worry. I will protect what you have devoted yourself to protecting."



After all, the Kamito had to settle his score with the Holy Kingdom sooner or later.

They had tried to target Restia during the Blade Dance, then attacked Areishia Spirit Academy.

One would expect them to know of Kamito's presence here by now.

"I am very grateful, successor. I only wish to guard the one who sleeps in peace."

The Queen of the Demon King City bowed deeply to Kamito.

"Yeah, just leave it to me. Although we're not blood-related, Demon King Solomon counts as an ancestor of sorts for me, I guess—"

Hearing Kamito's casual joke, the queen smiled happily.

"Indeed. Then I shall offer you, his descendant, a little gift."

"...Gift?"

Kamito asked in surprise—

Only to see the queen begin reciting unfamiliar verses in High Ancient.

In the next instant...

A vortex of darkness appeared over Kamito's head, then something fell into his arms.

"—Please take this, Ren Ashbell, Demon King's successor."

"This is...?"

Looking down at the pitch-black fabric in his arms, Kamito asked with puzzlement.

"...! That's the Garb of the Lord, Kamito."

"...Garb of the Lord?"

Hearing the darkness spirit speak in excitement for once, Kamito asked.

"It is the legendary item worn by Demon King Solomon on the battlefield."

"...! N-No way!?"

Kamito almost let go of the pitch-black fabric.

"Yes, this black garment is undoubtedly what he had worn. The high-density curse woven into the fabric is capable of absorbing spirit magic of all affinities and deflecting enemy blades."

"A-A curse... Is that really okay? Uh, like, would I get cursed..."

"Please rest assured. It will have minimal effect on you, who possesses the power of darkness."

"I-I see..."

...Then without the power of darkness, what would happen to the wearer?

(I somehow feel scared to ask...)

"You definitely need to accept this, Kamito!"

Restia kept flapping her jet-black wings.

...For as long as he could remember, Restia would always get strangely excited about magic artifacts.

"...G-Got it. Then I'll accept this with thanks."

Kamito opened up the black garment and draped it over his Academy uniform.

...What material was this made of? It felt almost weightless.

Impervious to weapons, capable of absorbing spirit magic, were such claims really true?

"Now that you have put on the *real thing*... I feel that you exhibit some Demon King style at last."

"Fufu, it looks great on you, Kamito."

'Dark Kamito, very dashing.'

Restia aside, even Est was speaking like that now.

...What the heck is Dark Kamito?

"It really looks great."

Looking at Kamito in that outfit—

The queen seemed to reminisce, her eye lids partially lowering, her eyes showing a gentle look.

"—Good luck."

## Part 3

"No mistake, it's the Holy Kingdom's knights."

Looking down at the plaza, Claire said quietly.

"...! How on earth did they get here!?"

Hearing that, Ellis lowered her voice and murmured.

"Who knows? Did they defeat the Sphinx too?"

They were on a bell tower tall enough to get a view of the whole plaza.

After hearing the explosion while they were at Quseir Amra, Claire and the girls immediately put on their uniforms. Claire and Ellis, with her outstanding mobility, were the first to go scouting.

Looking down, they saw a scene of horrifying destruction.

From the city gate to the pyramid, all the buildings along this straight line had vanished completely.

(Why would they do that...?)

It was impossible to understand with common sense.

Was it merely to open a path to the pyramid?

"No matter what, their goal must be the Demon King's Coffin hidden there, right?"

"Yes..."

While hiding behind a pillar on the bell tower, Ellis agreed quietly. Although she had used wind magic to insulate sound, preventing them from being heard in theory, there were no downsides to being careful and alert.

"Enemy numbers, roughly ten or so. A conservative estimate would include militarized spirits, I suppose."

"Hmm, that Luminaris Saint Leisched is here too—"

Looking down at the plaza, Claire calmly analyzed the enemy's combat potential.

The enemy consisted of spirit knights under the military. More than likely, they were an elite unit.

Although the two of them could hold their own against spirit knights after their training at Dracunia, fighting against so many at the same time would be unwise.

(Also—)

Claire kept her eyes on a girl standing in the center of the plaza.

It was an adorable young girl with long crimson hair and dressed in a scarlet dress.

(Who is that child...?)

Claire gulped.

She could feel pressure that made one break out in cold sweat even when looking from afar.

"She is a high-level spirit. Probably on Ortlinde's level, maybe even higher—"

"...Not an enemy we can handle."

Ellis agreed. Her forehead showed perspiration too.

"You still haven't reached Kamito yet?"

"No. I sent out wind familiars over a large area just now, but—"

"...Tsk, damn him. Where did he go at such a critical time!?"

"Hmm, I think he probably has not noticed the situation..."

Ellis murmured with worry.

"Let's go back to meet up with Fianna and the others."

"I agree. It would be best to relocate Her Highness to somewhere safe."

Just as they were about to stop scouting and retreat...

—*Bone-chilling terror.*

"...!?"

Feeling like someone had grabbed her heart, Claire's entire body froze.

"What is the matter, Claire?"

"...Ugh, El...lis... Run now—"

"What?"

Ellis looked back towards the plaza, only to see— The crimson-haired girl staring straight in their direction.

"Are we found!?"

At this distance, with a wind barrier to boot. Impossible!

A small fireball appeared in the girl's palm.

The fireball flew over with a whoosh.

"Ellis!"

"...! Vicious wind, rampage!"

It was a split-second decision.

The fireball flying head on was about to hit the bell tower.

The magic spear generated countless vacuum blades to intercept.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

An explosion. The spreading flames instantly engulfed the surroundings.

"Kyahh!"

Blown away by the blast, the two girls were tossed into the air.

"...! Simorgh!"

In the air, Ellis released her elemental waffe. Appearing out of thin air, the demon wind spirit caught the two falling girls and repelled the howling wave of scorching flames with a Wind Wall.

"Ellis, we're saved...!"

"...! What is going on!?"

With a dust cloud blocking their view, the two landed on a mountain of collapsed debris.

Standing with blazing flames all around, Claire wiped sweat from her forehead.

They were surrounded by intense flames. They had not seen anyone near the bell tower, so there were apparently no casualties— "W-What on earth was with that firepower... Isn't it spirit magic?"

The instant just before the explosion, they had seen a small fireball on the fingertips of the girl.

Could such a small fireball cause such great destruction in an instant?

"It does look quite similar to Fireball magic—"

"You are saying this was Fireball!?"

Hearing Claire's murmurs, Ellis groaned.

Fireball was a beginner's spell in fire magic with mediocre firepower.

For example, a Fireball cast by Claire, even with a full incantation, would blow away a house at best.

"Insolent ones. That was no Fireball just now—"

"...!?"

Hearing a girl's voice, Claire and Ellis turned their heads back.

Only to see—

Standing there was the girl from plaza just now.

She had long crimson hair. On the sides of her head were what seemed to be curved horns.

Wearing a scarlet dress, the girl was standing on the collapsed bell tower, haughtily looking down at them.

"—It was Flare Burst."

"...! What!?"

"Flare Burst, you say?"

Flare Burst was a type of diversion spell that used flashing light to distract the enemy's vision by firing off countless balls of light from one's palm. Its damage potential was virtually zero.

But that attack just now—

(...No way, it was even more powerful than my Hell Breath!) Hell Breath was the strongest fire spell in Claire's arsenal of spirit magic.

Although Claire's rational mind rejected the idea that the attack was just meant to scare— The girl exuded overwhelming pressure.

As a princess maiden, Claire's natural talent rivaled that of Fianna's. Her sharp intuition made her even more able than Ellis to sense the powerful aura in front of them.

However, Claire used her extraordinary willpower to glare at this unfathomable spirit.

"Y-You, who exactly are you? You're the one who destroyed the city, right!?"

Next—

"—*Are you asking for my true name?* Little girl."

"...!?"

Blazing flames surged from all over the girl's body.

A dust cloud billowed. Claire and Ellis could not help but back away.

"I am displeased by your rude stares. What gives you the gall to look down at me? If your answer fails to satisfy me—"

The girl's figure suddenly vanished like a mirage.

In the next instant, she appeared right before Claire and Ellis all of a sudden.

"Death is the punishment."

"...Ah... ooh...!"

Claire's entire body was frozen, like a mouse under a cat's stare.

The terrifying pressure had paralyzed her legs.



Just then—

"Hisssss!"

From a vortex of flame appearing in the air, a crimson hell cat jumped out to block the girl.

With intensely burning flames released from her entire body, she threatened the spirit in front of them.

"Scarlet!"

"Oh?"

Staring at the hell cat at her feet, the girl seemed surprised.

"An amazing spirit. I can see that it is a named spirit."

She instantly discerned Scarlet's rank, but remained unfazed.

(...This implies how powerful this spirit is—) With sweat emerging from her forehead, Claire desperately racked her brain.

Was there any way to create an opening to escape while this spirit was not attacking with full strength?

Ellis, with the protection of wind, might be able to escape on her own. But with her sense of chivalry, she would never agree to such a suggestion.

Just then—

"Hmm..."

Did she recall something?

The spirit with a girl's appearance kept looking back and forth between the hell cat at her feet and Claire.

Then—

Extending her index finger, she lightly pointed at Claire's nose.

"...!"

Bracing herself for a fireball to be shot out from the fingertip, Claire closed her eyes.

"—*I have changed my mind.*"

"...Huh?"

Claire opened her eyes and made a stupid sound.

"I like you. Hence, I shall overlook your crime of looking down at me."

"U-Uh..."

"What now? Are you dissatisfied?"

Seeing the girl frown, Claire hastily shook her head.

"N-No! B-But why so suddenly..."

"A feeling... You greatly resemble..."

"Greatly resemble? Who?"

"...Who? I do not know either."

"...?"

A questioning look appeared on Claire's face.

"But in my memory, there is a princess maiden with a face quite similar to yours."

The girl's clear eyes, like rubies, stared at Claire's face.

(...W-What is up with this girl?)

The girl was undoubtedly a high-level spirit, absurdly powerful.

But for such a powerful spirit—

Why would she show such an unsettled expression?



(...Also, a princess maiden who resembles me a lot?) At this moment, the girl slowly reached out and caught the sleeve of Claire's uniform.

"Hell cat girl, I can pardon your crime, but you must follow my orders."

"...Huh?"

Claire could not help but react.

...What was she going to demand?

(Will she take Ellis as a sacrifice in exchange for sparing my life?) Claire would never agree to such a demand— Looking straight at Claire, the girl spoke.

"Show me around this city—"

## Part 4

Wearing the Garb of the Lord over his clothes, Kamito quickly passed through the corridor leading to the Great Temple of the Celestial Demon.

The place where the Demon King and the Sacred Maiden's final duel had taken place.

He would be able to wield his dual swords freely in that place.

The intruder was Cardinal Millennia Sanctus.

In that case, his opponent would not be someone from a lower tier like Luminaris. If his hunch was correct, the other intruder would be none other than the former Numbers knight who had accompanied Millennia in the attack on the Academy.

(Lurie Lizaldia, huh?)

He had fought her just once.

It was underground beneath the Academy town, in the place called the Demon King's Burial Chamber— At the time, Kamito had amnesia.

(An elementalist extremely skilled in martial arts. She is stronger than any Numbers knight I have fought.) However, she was inferior to Greyworth. This was Kamito's impression of her.

Still, she apparently had not gone all out back then—

"Restia, about what the queen said—"

Suddenly remembering something, Kamito spoke to the demon sword of darkness in his hand.

'What is it?'

"Is it true? She said the Holy Lord offered a contract to Demon King Solomon."

'This is my first time hearing of it. I never thought the Demon King's birth would involve the leader of the Elemental Lords—'

"Figures. You didn't know either."

'Yes, I mentioned it before. To the Demon King, I was nothing more than an excellent weapon. I was normally sealed in the ring, forbidden from speaking to him like this. Now that I think about it, he might have known that I was the guide created by the Darkness Elemental Lord—'

"Legends describe him as using seventy-two spirits. But for the Demon King, only that lady Iris was his true contracted spirit..."

While running, Kamito muttered with a strange expression.

"But if what she said was true, why would Holy Lord Alexandros form such a contract with the Demon King?"

Logic dictated that the Five Great Elemental Lords should be responsible for maintaining peace and order in the world.

Hence, that was why they fought the Darkness Elemental Lord who disrupted the world's balance.

Then why...?

(A thousand years ago, was the Holy Lord already insane, corrupted by the Otherworldly Darkness?) If that were true, it made some sense, but— (Three years ago, the day I won the Blade Dance, the Holy Lord's throne was empty—) ...Starting when had it been empty? Fifteen years ago, at the previous tournament, or twenty-four years ago when Greyworth won?

Why was the Holy Lord's throne the only one empty?

The mystery was impossible to unravel.

—Was the Holy Lord *really corrupted by the Otherworldly Darkness*?

(...No matter what, the only way to find out is to ask those Holy Kingdom people, right?) The Holy Kingdom of Lugia was a religious country that worshiped Holy Lord Alexandros.

They took action according to the will of the missing Holy Lord. This should

probably be the case.

Putting his hands on the hilts of his two swords, Kamito quickened his pace.

## Part 5

Lurie Lizaldia advanced straight through the dark space of the Demon King's Tomb.

Demon King Solomon's headquarters in the past, this place was spatially warped, turned into a chaotic labyrinth.

This must be the work of the Tomb's caretaker.

"Petty trick to prevent easy intrusion."

Lurie revealed a faint smile and used spirit magic to dispel the space in front of her.

Once the space was severed, yet another disorganized passage appeared.

"Where is your patience, *Yggdra*? How unlike you."

"Yes, I am definitely impatient. After all, my *wish* will soon come true—"

Lurie unleashed harsh holy light at the floor.

The hall's floor instantly collapsed, cracking open to reveal a great dark hole.

Millennia created a spherical force field and the two of them descended gradually.

Yggdra Saint Asoritess.

This was the name of the girl who once harbored dreams of saving mankind.

Born in a border village, she was gifted with talent for healing since birth.

Called the sacred maiden reborn, this girl went all over the world to help villagers suffering in war and the injured on battlefields.

She firmly believed that her mission in the world was to save the weak.

However, at some point, the girl noticed... She realized.



The Ranbal War. During this most cruel war, sparked by conflict between nations— The people she saved would soon end up sent to the next battlefield. Some of them died while others took many enemy lives.

In the end, her act of saving people only served to generate even more deaths.

For the sake of changing this mad world—

—Fifteen years ago, Yggdra participated in the Blade Dance.

Her intention was to use the Elemental Lords' power of miracles to eliminate hatred from the world.

(—If I put an end to everything, then my deep sins can be forgiven, right?) Vestments of pure white, without the slightest speck of dirt, fluttered. She looked down into depths of the dark hole.

When holy light illuminated the darkness, the world shall be reborn with everything good and right, yes?

(A world with neither hatred nor war—)

The light from the holy staff held up by Millennia Sanctus illuminated the dark hole.

The two of them descended slowly into what appeared to be a great hall.

The Great Temple of the Celestial Demon, this was where the Sacred Maiden had fought the Demon King in the past.

"Perfect location for a blade dance. Is he here?"

"—Yes. *I can sense the other me.*"

Millennia's violet eye glowed eerily in the darkness.

Countless spirit crystals in the Great Temple of the Celestial Demon lit up.

"Hey there, I've been waiting. Lurie Lizaldia—"

At the same time, a figure appeared out of the darkness.

A young man dressed in black, wielding a demon sword of darkness and a sacred sword of steel— "We meet again, Ren Ashbell."

Lurie Lizaldia chuckled and slowly reached out into the air.

The winner of the Blade Dance fifteen years ago and the winner from three years ago.

—The Two Blade Dancers met.

# Chapter 10 - The Two Blade Dancers

## Part 1

—Dispassionate Queen of Steel, the sacred sword that incubates true darkness.

—Now form the Sword of the Celestial Demon and be the power in my hand!

Lurie Lizaldia reached into the air.

Millennia Sanctus' body then turned into particles of light and vanished.

Seeing the object that manifested in Lurie's hand the next instant— (...! What the hell?)

Kamito mentally jumped in surprise.

His memories from the underground battle under the Academy town awakened. The elemental waffe he had witnessed back then was supposed to be a terrifying demon sword, quite similar to Greyworth's.

But this time, held in her hand was a double-edged sword shining with silver-white sacred light.

Millennia Sanctus.

Although the spirit Iris had described her as *a being neither spirit nor human* — Since she could turn into an elemental waffe, that meant she was a spirit after all?

Kamito stared at the silver-white sword held up in Lurie's hands.

Probably a sword spirit like Est. The hilt's decoration also seemed a bit similar.

Although probably not in the same class as the Demon Slayer, given that Millennia could also take on human form, then surely she must be high-level spirit.

Kamito's neck perspired a little.

"Hand over the *sacred relic*, Ren Ashbell."

"Sacred relic?"

"What lies hidden in the deepest part of this Tomb."

Lurie held up her sword-shaped elemental waffe at a slant.

Kamito had never seen such a stance before. It was not Ordesian swordsmanship.

"How ironic. The Holy Kingdom considers the Demon King's Coffin a sacred relic?"

"—Fufu, *how utterly ignorant.*"

Instantly, Lurie's blood lust exploded.

"...!?"

A flash within a breath's duration. Lurie closed the distance all at once.

This was terrain reduction, a basic martial arts skill executed by concentrating divine power underfoot then exploding it. However, her speed was extraordinary. In merely an instant, she had closed in on Kamito far away to engage in combat.

A scattering of sparks. The violent clash of steel resounded throughout the temple.

Using the Demon Slayer, Kamito blocked the heavy first strike.

(...! What's with this crazy strength!?)

Using her momentum, Lurie swung her sword fully.

Kamito was blown away by the impact.

"Damn it...!"

Hastily, Kamito stabbed the Demon Slayer into the floor to resist the force.

With a savage grin on her face, Lurie stepped forward.

Boom—With a noise resembling the firing of a projectile, she charged.

Kamito swung his sacred sword from its downward pointing position, using the reaction force from his movement to deflect Lurie's blade.

While the sword traced out a semi-circular flash, Kamito jumped at the same time.

Moonlit Sky Dash—This was a half-baked move of the Absolute Blade Arts that did not consume divine power.

The Demon King's black garb spun in the air. Then— "Absolute Blade Arts, Second Form—Meteor!"

Kamito crossed his two swords and swung them down.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

The astounding impact was unleashed together with the sound of an explosion.

The stone floor was dug up radially, forming a huge crater.

—However, he was a moment too late. Lurie had already jumped.

Follow-up attack. With his back to the scattering debris, Kamito kicked the ground.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form—Purple Lightning."

He released explosive divine power in an instant. Leaving an afterimage, he charged right up to his enemy.

The activation speed of this move was as quick as lightning streaking across the sky, hence its name.

However, Lurie was already prepared. Her lips fluttered slightly.

"—Day of wrath, sword apostles, to your positions with haste!"

"...!?"

What appeared before Kamito were countless swords of light, sprouting from

the floor.

This was spirit magic of steel affinity. It would be easy to use the Demon Slayer's strength to sweep them all away, but— (A trap, huh?)

Kamito felt from instinct. There was something ominous about Lurie's sword stance.

The spirit magic was a ruse to lure him into charging in.

Clang—!

Kamito stabbed his sword into the ground to halt his momentum. Immediately, he jumped sideways next.

Lurie's eyes widened slightly. Sure enough, she had planned to counterattack.

All pointing at Kamito, the swords of light began to pursue him like a shoal of fish.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form—Shadowmoon Waltz, Double Turn!"

Three simultaneous flashes of the sword completely shredded the swords of light.

He landed. Just as the hem of his garment touched the ground, Lurie instantly closed in from the front.

"—Mistral Arc!"

Exhaling sharply, she executed killing sword move.

It was a swift thrust rivaling the Purple Lightning Kamito had just performed.

Too late to block. Kamito twisted his head in the nick of time and dodged. His cheek was scratched lightly, producing a splatter of blood. Had he evaded a beat slower, Kamito's head would have separated from his body.

"...!"

Kamito lost balance slightly. Immediately—

"—Éclair Orange!"

A storm-like flurry of sword strikes attacked Kamito.

Kamito hastily used both swords to defend. However, he failed to deflect

everything. The frenzy of silver-white sword moves mercilessly slashed Kamito's shoulder.

"Gah...!"

'—Kamito!'

Est cried out.

"...Ohhhhhhhhh!"

Kamito exhaled mightily. Instead of faltering, he stepped forward.

Caught by surprise, Lurie hastily backed away.

"—Go forth and pierce, Vorpall Blast!"

Released from the demon sword's blade, jet-black lightning poured towards Lurie— "—Day of punishment, may the branded be protected!"

A magic circle appeared in front of her. The barrier of light neutralized the demon lightning of darkness.

Grand Alexandros—Top-tier spirit magic only talented individuals bearing the rank of saint were capable of using.

"—What a shame. A darkness spirit's power doesn't work against me."

Indeed, the holy spirit magic she used was extremely unfavorable for Restia, a darkness spirit. This was precisely why during the Blade Dance three years ago, Ren Ashbell had faced an unexpectedly tough battle against the paladin Luminaris.

(She's strong—)

Among all the opponents Kamito had ever fought, Lurie was undoubtedly top-class.

If Greyworth's sword was like a storm, then Lurie's would be like swift wind.

Sure enough, last time they fought underground of the Academy, she was only testing him.

"Strong as they say, expected of the strongest Blade Dancer."

Lurie spoke praise.

"Same goes for you. Miraculous Healer, gimme a break."

Holding his shoulder, Kamito brought up her nickname back when she was part of the Numbers.

"Healing is my profession. Swordsmanship is just a hobby."

"Liar. You're stronger than anyone in the Numbers."

Saying that, Kamito spat blood at his feet.

"Yggdra Saint Asoritess, winner of the Blade Dance fifteen years ago."

"Ah, so you know—"

Hearing him, Lurie smiled wryly.

"Even though my appearance is completely different from back then."

She was a top-tier healer. Altering her appearance would have been a piece of cake.

"Why are you joining forces with the Holy Kingdom when you're a Blade Dance winner?"

Entering a stance with the dual swords of darkness and steel in his hands, Kamito asked.

"I'll tell you if you can defeat me."

Likewise, Lurie readied her sacred sword at a slant.

"We are both winners of the Blade Dance. Let us decide here and now who deserves the name of the Strongest Blade Dancer."

"...Both winners? Please—"

Kamito laughed fearlessly.

"There are plenty of Blade Dance winners, *but I am the strongest of all time and no one else.*"

Saying that, he took off the Garb of the Lord that he had been wearing.

"...? What are you doing—"

Unable to understand Kamito's actions, Lurie frowned.



Kamito moved his neck in a circle and pressed his hand on his shoulder.

There were no wounds at the place where Lurie's sword had slashed.

Presumably, the Garb of the Lord had defended him. Living up to its name as a legendary artifact, its properties were nothing to sneer at.

'Kamito, what are you doing!?'

Seeing Kamito take off the black garment, Restia grumbled.

"...Wait, you must have noticed halfway through."

'...'

When confronted with his argument, the darkness spirit stayed silent in embarrassment.

"Although I'll have to say sorry to Iris-san, but this is too far away from my own style."

In fact, Kamito had felt a tiny sense of dissonance when he first put on the black garment— He confirmed it when he performed an Absolute Blade Art— Purple Lightning.

Apparently, the curse woven into the black fabric would disrupt the flow of divine power.

Even though its defensive properties were outstanding, wearing it would dull the sharpness of the Absolute Blade Arts, which required precise control of divine power.

Sure enough, this was something that only Demon King Solomon could use to full effect.

Back in his familiar Areishia Spirit Academy uniform look, Kamito performed a few swings of the sword in a relaxed manner.

"I knew it, this outfit prepared by the hag suits me better."

"Are you sure? Ren Ashbell."

Watching him, Lurie spoke.

"It was all thanks to that black outfit that you escaped a critical wound just

now, right?"

"I guess..."

Kamito admitted it simply.

Just as she had pointed out, if the slash earlier had cut him directly, his shoulder would have been deeply injured.

However—

"Don't worry. *Your sword will no longer hit me.*"

"...! What a joke—Ren Ashbell!"

Lurie's blood lust exploded.



## Part 2

"What on earth are you doing!?"

"W-What choice do I have? We'll both get turned to charcoal if I refused."

"Fair enough..."

While walking along the main road, Ellis and Claire were whispering to each other.

They glanced behind them—

A spirit with the appearance of a young girl was walking a few steps behind them, looking at the buildings with curiosity.

For some unknown reason, the spirit seemed to like Claire in particular, asking about this or that in the streets and even inquired about things such as customs in the human realm.

(...Who exactly is this child?)

She was undoubtedly quite a high-ranked spirit, but in that case, why was she traveling with the Holy Kingdom's knights? Suppose she were a spirit converted for military use, there was no way she would be able to behave so independently and arbitrarily.

(Or maybe she's not part of their group?) No matter what, the current situation must be unexpected for the Holy Kingdom's knights too.

Right now, the knights were surely sending spirits to track them. Although Ellis had sent out wind spirits to interfere with tracking, however—A fight was guaranteed as soon as they encountered each other.

(Before that happens, we have to meet up with Kamito as soon as possible...) While strolling the streets with the girl and keeping her happy, they had to look for Kamito without the Holy Kingdom's knights finding them. This was quite a

tough mission.

"Hell cat girl, what is that building? I sense the powers of my fire spirit kin."

With eyes filled with curiosity, the girl pointed to a building that had a chimney.

"That's a pottery workshop. Inside, they have fire spirits working kilns for firing pottery."

A knowledgeable honors student, Claire explained to her.

"Oh I see... Earth is good. Even though earth is stubborn, we get along well."

The girl nodded with satisfaction, murmuring incomprehensibly to herself.

"Large pottery workshops would also have water spirits and wind spirits, as well as princess maidens to serve them. Water spirits are in charge of kneading clay while wind spirits are in charge of drying them."

"Water... That girl is hard for me to deal with..."

Tugging Ellis' sleeve, Claire whispered in her ear.

"Hmm, she doesn't seem to be that bad a spirit. Let's continue observing."

"I have no opinion on that. However, why are you the only one she acts friendly towards? Any clues to that?"

"Like I said, I just happen to resemble the princess maiden who used to be contracted to her—"

"Are such coincidences likely?"

"Who knows..."

"What are you two whispering about?"

"...!"

Secretly conversing, the two girls instantly jumped in surprise.

"N-Nothing!"

"J-Just discussing where to continue our tour next."

"Hmm, then it is fine—"

Hearing Claire's explanation, the girl soon returned to a good mood— "Then what place are you showing me next?"

With eyes filled with anticipation, she looked at them.

Claire pondered briefly—

"Before I lead the way, there's something I'd like to ask."

"Request permitted. You are in my favor. Ask away."

Always maintaining her haughty attitude, the girl nodded.

"Just now in the plaza, weren't you together with those Holy Kingdom knights? Are they your friends?"

"Those people, huh—"

Hearing that, the girl fidgeted with her hair in boredom.

"I merely lend them some power because they said they wanted to borrow my help. As for what they are doing, I have no idea."

(...In other words, even though they're cooperating, she's not being commanded?) Claire wondered in her mind.

"Then they were the ones who asked you to wreck the city?"

"Hmm. More precisely, they asked to open a hole in the pyramid."

"I-I see..."

Sure enough, the straight line of destruction in the city was merely for creating a shortcut.

"W-What!? I cannot believe you wrecked the city for such a reason!"

As expected, Ellis began to get mad.

"Why get so worked up? Aren't there plenty of such mere buildings?"

"...What!?"

"Ellis, calm down!"

Claire hastily tried to restrain the justice-minded Ellis— Then she asked the girl, who was tilting her head in puzzlement.

"...I get it now. But please don't burn the city any more."

Claire looked straight into the girl's eyes.

In response, the girl blinked her eyes, which happened to be the same color as Claire's— "...So alike, as I thought."

She murmured quietly.

"Very well. I burned it only because it was in my way. Unnecessary destruction is not to my liking either."

(...Hmm, she does listen.)

Originally worried if she might get angry, Claire breathed a sigh of relief.

...Next, the trio continued to walk the streets, arriving at another plaza.

There was not a single person in sight in this plaza. Probably due to the explosion earlier, everyone had fled.

"Looks like Kamito had been to this plaza—"

Hearing whispers from the wind, Ellis spoke.

"Jeez, where the heck has he run off to..!?"

Never did it occur to the two girls that he was already inside the pyramid.

Just then, the spirit girl sniffed.

"There is an aroma in the air. Hell cat girl, what is it?"

She pointed at an unattended shop.

"It's a food stand. Until just now, this should've been a busy market—"

"But everyone seems to have fled."

"I-I already said I wouldn't!"

The girl looked away in embarrassment.

"By the way, is that an offering?"

With a flutter of her scarlet dress, she walked briskly to approach the shop.

"Oh no, don't take things without permission!"

"Stealing is wrong!"

Claire and Ellis hastily chased after her.

It seemed to be a shop selling baked goods.

Unlike the fashionable shops at the Academy town, there were no glass display windows or the like here.

What the spirit girl was especially interested in were baked goods resembling donuts with abundant sugar sprinkled over deep-fried dough.

"Hell cat girl, I want that one."

"Wanting it is fine, but you have to pay properly."

"No. Isn't it a matter of fact that whatever I want must be offered up to me?"

She brought up a barbaric philosophy in response.

"If denied to me, I suppose I might as well burn everything—"

"W-Wait, stop it right there! Why are you jumping to that conclusion!?"

Seeing a fireball appear in the girl's hand, Claire could not help but shout.

"Didn't you just promise not to destroy the city!?"

"Hmm, true..."

Unexpectedly, the girl nodded obediently and dispelled the surging flames.

"Sigh, I feel like I'm being dragged around by the nose..."

Claire sighed and took out some silver coins that she had exchanged earlier.

"We have to put down the money properly. Then it's okay, right?"

"...That still is not right, but I shall overlook it this once."

The rigid Ellis seemed to acquiesce.

"..."

Holding a donut, the spirit girl stared intently at it.

"What's the matter, you're not going to eat it?"

"How do I eat this?"



"Take a bite, like this—"

Claire opened her mouth and bit a donut. Daughters of nobility normally had little chance of coming across this type of food, but Rinslet frequently made donuts as refreshments. Although the donut was not fresh out of the fryer, it was sweet, fluffy with a crisp surface. Very delicious.

"Hmm..."

Imitating Claire, the girl began to take big bites.

"I see. This is good. Praiseworthy."

With her mouth stuffed with donut, she looked as adorable as a small pet.

Probably because she was in a good mood, the tips of her curved horns even had small flames lighting up.

(...If I had a little sister, would she be like this?) Claire suddenly remembered something.

"Say..."

"What is it, hell cat girl?"

"...What is your name again?"

"Claire, umm—"

Ellis had panic on her face.

Asking a high-level spirit for their name would be regarded as rude behavior.

In fact, the girl seemed quite angry when Claire asked for her true name previously.

However—

"After all, it's hard to address her without a name."

Claire argued back.

"It doesn't have to be a true name. A nickname like Scarlet is fine too."

"Hmm, a nickname, huh? In that case—"

The spirit girl nodded.

"I am addressed as Lord."

"...Huh?"

"Hmm, how now, what is with your reaction?"

"Uh, you got the wrong idea—"

Just as Claire was about to complain...

"—*Lord Volcanicus!*"

A sharp voice resounded across the entire plaza.

"...!?"

Claire looked back—

Only to see a team of knights with swords drawn, surrounding the plaza.

The voice belonged to Luminaris of the Sacred Spirit Knights.

"...! We are discovered—!?"

Ellis immediately deployed her elemental waffe—Ray Hawk.

Ayla Cedar was the special operative in the Sacred Spirit Knights. She specialized in espionage and tracking. Presumably, her shadow spirit, Shade Wolf, had followed them.

Luminaris' eyes widened in surprise.

"Claire Rouge of Ordesia. Why are you here!?"

"...! Claire, what do we—"

Ellis bit her lip and asked Claire behind her.

...But Claire did not answer.

"Claire?"

Ellis looked back—

"...Did you say *Volcanicus?*"

Gone pale in the face, Claire was staring at the spirit girl.

## Part 3

"—Hiver Défense!"

Lurie Lizaldia's thrust traced a trajectory like lightning. This was a sword skill executed with extreme mastery of terrain reduction. Its speed was comparable to Purple Lightning's.

Faced with such a blade—

"Don't think you're still fighting the me just now—"

"!?"

As the two fighters crossed, Kamito used his demon sword to counter her move.

Timing perfectly to take into account his enemy's sword speed and even the angle of her blade, Kamito mounted a perfect counterattack.

Her thrust was designed to execute a follow up attack any time even if the first strike failed to connect.

But Kamito easily thwarted that intention.

Lurie was shoved aside, blown away while brushing against the ground.

The brightness of divine power left a trail of afterimages in the darkness. In that instant, she spun and kicked the ground, slashing with her sword like a whip.

However, Kamito read her attack in advance. Forcibly executing an attack while off balance would lead to critical openings—Kamito raised the Demon Slayer fluidly.

With the acute noise of metal clashing, Lurie's arm was deflected upwards.

Kamito immediately swung the demon sword of darkness, striking the body of her blade heavily.

"Gah...!"

Witnessing his blade dance movements that almost seemed like spectacular performance, Lurie shuddered in terror.

His entire body's movements were completely different from just now.

Did such a massive change come about simply from him taking off the black outfit?

"...I see. Looks like you weren't bluffing."

Probably realizing she would be overwhelmed in close quarters combat, she kicked the floor and backed away.

Then making a hand sign, she swiftly chanted spirit magic.

Zap zap—seven spheres of light appeared out of thin air with lightning, hurtling towards Kamito.

This was Lightning Ball—high-level spirit magic that launched a homing ball of holy elemental lightning.

There were only a handful of elementalists in the Holy Kingdom capable of reciting the incantation seven times simultaneously.

"Can you dodge all of them, Ren Ashbell!?"

"I don't need to dodge!"

Kamito took a breath and spun around, swinging the Demon Slayer.

Glowing with silver-white brilliance, the blade swept away the lightning balls surrounding Kamito all at once.

"You erased them simply with the sword's aura!?"

Lurie's face was contorted by shock.

Amazingly, simply touching the divine power enveloping the sacred sword's blade was enough to erase high-level spirit magic.

"Sorry, petty tricks don't work on me—"

Kamito exploded divine power under the soles of his feet against the ground, closing the distance in one go.

Before the impact arrived, the flash of his sword came first.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Introductory Form—Bursting Cherry Blossom Flurry!"

The liberated rain of swords fell with countless afterimages.

This was an offshoot skill derived from the Destructive Form, ninth of the Absolute Blade Arts.

An anti-personnel sword skill that was key to mastering the ultimate move, Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance.

A frenzy slashing dance of light and darkness.

The countless consecutive attacks performed by the two swords were overwhelming Lurie's defense by sheer quantity.

The speed and precision of his sword was on a completely level than before.

Soon enough, Lurie's defense was forced open and she took a misstep.

"—I've waited a long time for this, Lurie."

Seeing that, Kamito said.

"—This is Ren Ashbell, the Strongest Blade Dancer."

"...!?"

Using the Demon Slayer, Kamito dealt a heavy blow to her raised sacred sword.

With a scattering of sparks, her petite frame was sent flying from the impact.

"...Cough... Huff—"

"..."

Looking down at her, crouching on the floor, Kamito pointed his sacred sword at her.

"Someone on your level should be able to understand. You can't beat me."

"It's not, over yet... Ren Ashbell...!"

"...!?"

Lurie stood up, stabbing the sacred sword against the floor.

Her entire body became shrouded in holy light as her wounds slowly began to heal.

She smiled savagely.

(...I see—)

Kamito noticed what supported her formidable strength.

No matter who—

Even accomplished martial artists would be vulnerable to instinctive fear in their subconscious.

However, Lurie did not fear injury.

Her talent as a miraculous healer was inborn and would automatically heal her injured body without needing conscious intent.

Hence, her instinctive fear of injury was weakened.

Indeed, this could be considered a kind of strength.

(However, that's—)

A very twisted kind of strength. It was also a kind of strength that one obtained only through painful experiences.

Lurie used both hands to raise her glowing sacred sword.

"Come, let's continue our blade dance, Ren Ashbell—"

"..."

Kamito readied his dual swords again.

'—Kamito, you understand, right?'

"Yeah."

Hearing Restia's voice, Kamito nodded lightly.

Even though he held the advantage all this time— ...This was unsustainable. The battle must not drag on.

Consecutive use of the Absolute Blade Arts would consume divine power, causing Kamito's own reserves to dwindle.

(This will be bad unless I settle things as quickly as possible.)

## Part 4

"...Did you say *Volcanicus*?"

Claire was so surprised that her entire body froze.

There was probably no one on the continent who did not know this name.

Fire Elemental Lord Volcanicus, ruling over the fire spirits, was one of the five Elemental Lords.

(Don't tell me... this child is...?)

Her mind in chaos, Claire suddenly remembered something.

(Come to think of it, Nee-sama said before—) She remembered it was when they were heading to rescued the imprisoned Fianna— On board the flying ship, her sister had mentioned it.

At the Elemental Lord's shrine, they had liberated the Fire Elemental Lord from the Otherworldly Darkness' corruption.

At the time, the Fire Elemental Lord vanished and was transported somewhere— Wasn't that the holy capital of Alexandria?

(Right, no mistake...)

Claire bit her lip hard.

This girl was the incarnation of the Fire Elemental Lord.

She was the same as the Iseria Seaward's incarnation that had teleported to Astral Zero.

In that case, it was only natural for her to wield powers capable of destroying a city in an instant.

(This child is the Fire Elemental Lord... who destroyed my homeland...!) "Lord Volcanicus, please distance yourself from those people!"



At the plaza's entrance, Luminaris called out.

However, the spirit girl glared at her.

"What is the matter with you people? I am currently having fun with them."

The girl's crimson hair stood up on end, wavering like flames.

That astounding aura of wrath made the Sacred Spirit Knights all freeze.

Only Luminaris managed to stand firm and hold her ground.

"O Lord, please forgive us. We are only fulfilling our responsibilities as your bodyguards."

"Oh? Who are you to worry about my safety?"

"...!?"

Confronted by the Fire Elemental Lord's blazing wrath, Luminaris turned deathly pale.

The only reason why the Fire Elemental Lord had not turned the paladinss into charcoal was because she had promised Claire just now.

"I have no need for bodyguards. I shall remain in these people's company."

Saying that, she turned to Claire.

Now, she noticed for the first time.

Claire's gaze towards her had changed completely.

"Seriously, ah..."

"...What is it?"

"You really are the Fire Elemental Lord..."

Claire's twintails were standing up like burning flames.

As though looking at a mortal enemy, Claire glared at the girl.

"What now, hell cat girl?"

"You, it's all because of you, Nee-sama and my parents...!"

Tears flowed out of her clear ruby-like eyes.

The downpour of the rain of fire. Cities burning in a blaze. Endless cries of suffering. The people rushing to the castle.

With the people's curses in the background, that very day when she had been banished from the castle together with her parents— "...What are you talking about?"

The spirit girl made a perplexed look, standing there frozen.

Most likely concluding this to be the best opportunity to reclaim her— "Please leave them, Lord."

Luminaris drew her sword and charged swiftly. She intended to take this opportunity to take Claire out.

"—Do not think you will succeed!"

Holding Ray Hawk, Ellis blocked her path.

"Get lost, small fry!"

Luminaris swung her sacred sword, Murgleis.

Faced with that sword, glowing with holy light— "...!"

Ellis blocked using the shaft of her magic spear.

"What?"

Luminaris widened her blue eyes in shock.

She never expected her merciless strike to be blocked.

"Is this all you can do, Dame Luminaris?"

"...Gah!?"

Wind gathered at Ray Hawk's spear tip, producing a thunderous rumble.

"Take that...!"

Releasing the compressed air, Ellis blew away the holy sword.

Not expecting a counterattack from whom she thought was a small fry, Luminaris lost balance.

Ellis did not miss the opportunity. Immediately, she rotated her magic spear

and attacked with lightning speed.

Enveloped with magical wind, the spear tip pierced the paladin's mythril gauntlet, shattering it.

"Damn you!"

Luminaris was plunged into confusion.

Ellis Fahrengart.

The second daughter of Duke Fahrengart, hailing from a prestigious Ordesian noble house with generations of military tradition.

That was the extent of what Luminaris knew about her.

When entering the Blade Dance, Luminaris had focused virtually all her attention on Ellis' adopted sister Velsaria Eva, completely unconcerned about the younger sister.

"Dame Luminaris, I used to admire you, having blade danced against Ren Ashbell—"

Spinning the magic spear of wind fluidly in one hand, Ellis spoke.

"—But as I am now, *I am stronger than you.*"

She stepped forward, closing the distance all at once.

The thrust of godly speed, enveloped in a storm, was deflected by Luminaris with the holy sword.

"Don't get too full of yourself, mere student knight!"

"I return the same words to you. Do not belittle the Sylphid Knights!"

Their elemental waffen clashed intensely again.

A hurricane-like storm surrounded the crossing blades.

Just as their blade dance gradually intensified— Claire and the Fire Elemental Lord continued to stare at each other silently.

"Hell cat girl—"

Volcanicus was the first to break the silence.

"Do you hate me?"

"...Uh—"

Claire was speechless.

She was not even sure of her own feelings.

(...Is this child really the Fire Elemental Lord who destroyed my homeland?)  
No wait, this girl was undoubtedly the incarnation of the Elemental Lord, but—  
Claire thought back to the Water Elemental Lord's incarnation she had met on Ragna Ys.

(She had lost virtually all of her memories as an Elemental Lord...) In that case, this Fire Elemental Lord might have lost her memories too.

In other words, she might not remember what she had done in the past.

"...Can I ask a question?"

Claire said.

"Do you still remember the name of the princess maiden who resembles me a lot?"

"..."

The Fire Elemental Lord shook her head calmly.

"I do not remember her name, but—"

She replied with apparent sadness.

"She is my precious friend. This is the one thing I recall clearly."

"...I see. In that case—"

Hearing that—

Claire steeled a certain measure of determination in her heart.

This girl was the enemy who had destroyed Elstein. However— "Volcanicus, I want to bring you to meet someone."

"...What?"

"Make your decision now. Will you return to those Holy Kingdom people or

will you come with us?"

"...!"

The Fire Elemental Lord stared intently into Claire's ruby-like eyes. Perhaps through Claire, she was looking at the image of the dear friend who greatly resembled Claire.

After several seconds of silence—

"...That will not be possible."

She shook her head.

"Why?"

"I am bound by a covenant with those people. I cannot break it."

"No way...!"

With a weak smile, the Fire Elemental Lord fluttered her dress.

"Although it was brief, I greatly enjoyed myself on this occasion, hell cat girl."

Surrounded by intense crimson flames, the girl gradually disappeared.

Claire went "ah" but could not chase after her.

"...W-What the heck, this sucks!"

Unable to vent emotions that she could not tell was anger or something else, Claire kept stomping the ground.

Just then—

"Claire—"

Holding the magic spear, Ellis landed softly next to her.

"She went back to Astral Zero, right?"

"Yeah, looks like it..."

Nodding, Claire straightened her standing posture.

She looked around, only to see the two of them surrounded by ten members of the Sacred Spirit Knights.

...All things considered, chances of victory were slim if they had to fight this

many knights at the same time.

"Break through the encirclement and retreat."

"...Yes."

Saying that, Ellis readied Ray Hawk while Claire deployed Flametongue.

The two girls ran at the same time.

## Part 5

On the stage where the Demon King and the Sacred Maiden had dueled, came endless sounds of blades clashing.

Coincidentally, one of the combatants was a princess maiden whom people called a miraculous sacred maiden— While the other was the Demon King's successor, wielding the Demon Slayer.

The blade dance being performed all over this grand hall seemed to reenact a past era of legends.

"This very day, the blue sky wails, the earth shakes with anger—"

Pure white vestments fluttered up. Lurie Lizaldia chanted spirit magic.

Countless blades of holy light flew across the floor, slicing rows of stone pillars at their base.

However, Kamito had already disappeared from the ground.

Jumping freely between the collapsing stone pillars, he charged at Lurie to engage in combat.

This was high-level three dimensional movement—Assassination skills from the Instructional School.

For someone on his level, walls and floors were no different for him.

"—Go forth and pierce, Vorpal Blast!"

Released from a dead angle, jet-black demon lightning followed an unpredictable trajectory to attack Lurie.

In response, Lurie chanted defensive magic to neutralize the demonic lightning.

"A darkness spirit's power is useless against me."

"Of course I know that!"

Craaash!

With the fall of the stone pillars came an expanding cloud of dust.

In this environment with their vision completely obscured, a silver-white blade flashed.

The Demon Slayer and Lurie's nameless sacred sword crossed, producing sparks repeatedly.

"...!"

"This is not a knight's swordsmanship, Ren Ashbell. Are you getting anxious?"

"We are dueling here, not performing a blade dance for an audience."

Crossing blades up close, Kamito shouted.

Speed, power, judgment, experience, divine power, level of contracted spirit — In all these respects, Kamito was superior to Lurie.

However—

(But I'm the one who's getting cornered, huh?) He groaned in his thoughts.

Lurie's vestments glowed with phosphorescence.

Her injuries would always heal in an instant. That inborn freakish power—a power that one could very well call a curse—kept protecting her automatically.

It would do the same even if she herself did not want it, right?

Defeating the miraculous sacred maiden would require delivering a fatal blow to her in one hit.

However, Kamito could not bring himself to kill her. After all, there were things he had to ask.

...No, that was not the real reason.

(I am no longer an assassin of the Instructional School.) Restia and the friends he had met at the Academy had given him a human heart.

Hence, he would never use the power of spirits to take other's lives.



Then the only way to defeat the endlessly regenerating Lurie would be to wait until she exhausted her divine power.

However, Kamito could not do that either.

He had a troublesome time limit.

If he were to keep consuming divine power like this— The Darkness Elemental Lord's power would devour him.

No, the power of darkness had already started invading Kamito's consciousness.

Time was running out.

He had to decide.

"—Your sword has slowed down, Ren Ashbell!"

Lurie's sacred sword flashed.

Instead of using orthodox knightly swordsmanship, she was using moves modified from the dance of princess maidens.

She had trained in blade dancing, originally meant to serve as offerings to spirits, and attained dizzying heights in mastery.

"—So happy."

"Are you being sarcastic?"

While blocking sword strikes, Kamito spoke.

"I feel exhilarated purely from engaging a blade dance with the Strongest Blade Dancer."

"—Really?"

Kamito felt a dull sting in his heart, as though pierced by a small barb.

What he was about to do—

In a certain way, it might be even more cruel than taking her life.

If he were to use this move from the Absolute Blade Arts, she would never be able to blade dance again.

This was a taboo Absolute Blade Art that Greyworth had forbidden him to use.

After using it once, he had sworn to never use it ever again.

Kamito kicked the ground, jumping back.

Lurie stopped where she was instead of chasing after him.

The two backed away from each other, facing off.

"Are you out of options, Ren Ashbell?"

"No."

Saying that, Kamito stabbed the Vorpall Sword into the ground.

'...Kamito?'

Restia reacted with a surprised voice.

"—Sorry, Restia. This move of the Absolute Blade Arts cannot be used with two swords."

Also, the darkness element was ineffective against Lurie.

Restia seemed to realize what Kamito was about to do and soon fell silent.

Kamito held the Demon Slayer in both hands.

"What are you planning?"

"I'm not going to say 'don't hate me.' Prepare yourself."

He concentrated the divine power circulating through his entire body into the sword's blade.

—He had not used this move for three years.

But his body still remembered this Absolute Blade Art.

Ironically, that was because he had the most misgivings about this one move.

Probably feeling Kamito's silent pressure...

Lurie poured divine power into her nameless sacred sword in return.

Then—

The two of them moved.

Both took a step forward at the same time and ran.

"—Hiver Défense!"

Lurie used a move similar to Purple Lightning.

A thrust of reckless abandon, executed by one who did not fear injury.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

As for Kamito—

He bravely and decisively took the blow with his left arm.

The blade entered his flesh. Intense pain. But Kamito endured that and—  
Aiming at the heart where all circulating channels gathered, he stabbed his sacred sword right there.

"Cough—Huff—"

Instead of steel, the Demon Slayer was a sword of pure light.

Up until this point, everything happened just like the time when he had pierced Velsaria's heart— Last time, Kamito had erased a cursed armament seal.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Void Form—Soul Extinction!"

The instant Kamito shouted, the release divine power ran amok inside her body.

## Part 6

"Looks like this is the end."

Holding her sacred sword, Lurie Lizaldia collapsed on the spot.

She seemed to understand what had happened to her.

The phosphorescence enveloping her vanished. The miraculous power would no longer heal her, presumably.

Stabbed by the Demon Slayer, her chest showed no scar or wound.

However, something of paramount importance to elementalists had been destroyed by Kamito.

Absolute Blade Arts, Void Form—Soul Extinction.

The Absolute Blade Art that his master had banned.

He had shattered the circulation system in the human body for controlling divine power.

She could no longer chant spirit magic or form contracts with spirits.

The miraculous power to heal others. This power, which had saved innumerable people in the past, had been wrecked at Kamito's hands.

Kamito did not regret it. After all, there was probably no way to defeat her any other way.

Precisely because she was strong, Kamito to resort to this forbidden move of the Absolute Blade Arts.

Kamito looked down at Lurie, collapsed on the ground.

Then—

"You promised to tell me if I win, right? Can you tell me why you served the Holy Kingdom when you were already one of the Empire's Numbers?"

"...I suppose I did promise. Sigh, so be it."

With her head down, Lurie muttered to herself.

"I was born with the power to heal. I thought that using this power to save people was the mission entrusted to me, so I healed the numerous injured on battlefields."

However—She smiled weakly at this point.

"My belief was wrong. For each life I saved, double that would be lost when those I saved returned to the battlefield. Such absurdity repeated time and again."

Lurie recounted in a calm voice, which made her despair stand out more and more.

"Hence, that is why I wanted change. To take this absurd world and—"

"Then you entered the Blade Dance to—"

"Yes, hoping to change the world, I placed all my hopes on the *wish* granted by the Elemental Lords—"

Lurie looked up, staring off into space as though reminiscing about fifteen years ago.

"Uh, your wish..."

Mid-sentence, Kamito halted.

...It was clear as day once he thought about the current state of affairs on the continent.

"Yes, it was impossible. Even the miracle of the Elemental Lords could not grant the wish—"

"..."

"...But it was at that moment, in my disappointment I heard my master's voice in my mind."

"Your master?"

Kamito repeated her words. Lurie continued.

"Three years ago, *when you won, wasn't there an empty throne?*"

Kamito gasped violently.

The Lord of Light—Holy Lord Alexandros.

Was this Lurie the one who had liberated the Holy Lord?

"What is the Holy Lord's goal? What is the intention in secretly controlling the Holy Kingdom behind the scenes?"

Kamito's voice turned rough as he interrogated Lurie.

Lurie giggled, possibly because she enjoyed seeing Kamito lose composure.

"My master intends to rebuild the world from zero, to return everything to their rightful state. To take this world, which has strayed into the wrong path because of the Darkness Elemental Lord's mistakes—"

"...! What do you mean by—"

"You will understand eventually, Ren Ashbell. At the Elemental Lords' shrine, you saw *that* too, didn't you?"

Kamito silently gulped.

At the Elemental Lords' shrine, devoured by Otherworldly Darkness— Kamito had saw that scene.

—An army of countless *angels* standing amid endless darkness.

"Sooner or later, *that will be here.*"

Lurie Lizaldia spoke in a sadistic voice.

"...What did you say!?"

Kamito was speechless.

...What the hell did she mean?

"All we can do is be prepared for when that time arrives. For this purpose, the Coffin hidden inside this Tomb is essential—"

Lurie shook her head lightly then stumbled up to her feet.

"...! Lurie, you...?"

Kamito frowned.

As she was now, she should not be able to do anything, but— 'Kamito, I have a bad feeling about this—'

Restia's voice warned in his mind.

Just then, Kamito noticed.

There was an eerie glow from her heart as she stood up like a ghost!

(That's...!)

Shining on her chest was a spirit crystal the size of a fist.

Also, it was blood-red Bloodstone—

"...A Bloodstone!"

Kamito groaned involuntarily.

This was a spirit crystal of the highest purity that could only be excavated from the sanctuary of Astral Zero.

Previously, Kamito had seen Jio Inzagi use one to dominate spirits.

Compared to normal spirit crystals, it was able to seal much more powerful spirits.

"Have you heard of the weapon called spirit detonation?"

Saying that, Lurie Lizaldia smiled savagely.

"...!?"

Spirit detonation was a weapon from the Ranbal War era that had been designated sealed by international treaty.

It was capable of sealing hundreds of spirits together, compressing them then inducing them to react with one another to produce a massive explosion.

Its firepower was enough to level a small city easily.

It was a product of insanity, created during wartime.

"This pyramid is used to protect the Coffin's seal. Hence, all I need to do is destroy the pyramid itself."

"...! You planned this from the start—"

"...It was just a last resort."

Lurie smiled.

"...I am honored to have had a blade dance with the Strongest Blade Dancer.  
These are my true feelings."

Saying that, she stabbed herself in the heart with her sacred sword.

In that instant, crimson light exploded in a flash.



# Epilogue

## Part 1

An astounding explosion rocked the Demon King's Tomb.

One could imagine the destructive power from how the noise could be heard even from this burial chamber that was protected by the most secure barrier.

Inside a shining iridescent crystal, the spirit Iris sighed with despair.

"...! I never thought they would destroy the entire Tomb—"

Crack—A large fracture appeared on the surface of the spirit crystal.

With the collapse of the pyramid—the magic device for maintaining the barrier—this also implied the impending doom of the administrator, her.

In other words, the seal of the Demon King's Coffin, which she had guarded for so many years, was about to be lifted.

What Demon King Solomon had spent the last of his power to seal away, that which must not be freed— Indeed, what she had guarded was *not* the Demon King's remains.

His corporeal body had already returned to nothingness. Right now, only remnants of his soul remained in this city.

The Demon King's Coffin. Lying dormant inside the object bearing this name was— Creak, crack—Countless fissures covered the crystal's surface.

Next, the brilliant iridescent light leaked out in all directions from the cracks— Thus the crystal shattered in fragments.

## Part 2

"Master."

"What's the matter, Est?"

On that day, facing the sword spirit who had actively started a conversation with her in a rare moment, the young maiden tilted her head in puzzlement.

"Master, do you not have parents? Like other humans—"

"...Yes."

The girl showed sadness on her face and nodded.

"I was picked up by this village's chief as a child and raised. I don't know what my parents look like."

This was nothing rare. On the other hand, to be picked up by someone benevolent and raised with love, that would be considered almost a miracle— Why had her parents abandoned her? The girl did not know. She had asked the chief and the other villagers, but no one was willing to tell her.

*There is no need to know,* said the chief.

It was the first time the gentle chief had spoken to the girl in a strict voice.

After that, she was forbidden from bringing up her parents again in the village.

"However, I don't feel lonely—"

Saying that, the girl smiled at her partner sword spirit.

The chief and the villagers had treated her with kindness.

More importantly—

"Now, I have you, Est—"

The girl placed her hand on the sword spirit's head, gently caressing the

shining silver-white hair.

Expressionless until now, the sword spirit showed wavering in her eyes.

"—Me too, Master."

"...Hmm?"

The girl asked.

"Me too. I do not know where I came from or where I was born."

"I see—"

She had heard stories of how spirits came from somewhere out of this world. Legends told of human prayers and wishes crystallizing into elements, to be born in another world— ...Was Est different from the other spirits?

"Then you are the same as me, Est."

"—Yes, Master."

—This was a dream about the Sacred Maiden and the Sacred Sword in the past.

# Afterword

—Kamito, I will always be your contracted spirit, forever and ever.

Hello, this is Shimizu Yuu. Thank you everyone for your great patience. Here, I present to you the Volume 17 of Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance, "The Queen of the Demon King City."

Tracking down the missing Princess Saladia in the desert, Kamito and his friends sailed on a sand ship. What awaited them was unbelievably the Demon King's Capital that should have been destroyed a thousand years ago!?

So this time is a story centered around the legendary Demon King Solomon who gets mentioned from time to time. Revealed will be the truth of how he became the Demon King, as well as the being that had been working secretly behind the scenes of history.

With only three volumes till the series concludes, this means the plot will gradually approach the core. Cardinal Millennia Sanctus' true identity, the missing Elemental Lord, the Angel army that Kamito saw, the reason behind darkness spirit Restia's birth, as well as the true cause of the Spirit War breaking out seven thousand years ago—Until the every mystery is revealed, the plot will continue pushing ahead, so please stay with me to the very end!

Okay, now that we have reached Volume 17, there might be many people who find it tiring to recall what happened earlier in the story, or find it easy to forget details, *etc.* Because of that, the editorial department created a special booklet to introduce the plot, setting and characters. The special booklet will be available at bookstores that sell light novels, so please feel free to take one.

Next up are the usual acknowledgements and reports. Because Nimura-sensei is too busy, starting from the volume, Shimesaba Kohada-sensei will take over.

Sensei is an illustrator whose works include "Seikoku no Dragonar" and "Seiju no Kuni no Kinju Tsukai." Whether Est on the cover or Claire and the others in the illustrations, they're all so cute! Thank you very much!

Editor, proofreader, designer, thank you for taking care of me all the time.

Dear readers who will still need to be patient for a while, I am truly sorry for making everyone wait due to all kinds of reasons. Next up, Volume 18, will be brought to you as soon as possible.

Finally, I have a big announcement.

Surprise, Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance is getting an audio drama!

I can't release any details yet, but I am scheduled to write new plots. The voice actors from the anime will reprise their roles and imbue the characters with souls. I'm so excited. Please look forward to it.

And so, let's meet again with Volume 18, "Retaking the Imperial Capital" (tentative)!

Shimizu Yuu, 2018

# Illustrator's Afterword

## イラストレーター あとがき。

はじめましての方も、ご存知の方も、  
ごきげんよう、メ鯨コハダです。  
今回の精霊使いの剣舞17巻から  
イラストを担当させて  
頂くことになりました。  
著者の志瑞先生やイラストの  
桜はんぺん先生、仁村有志先生の  
築き上げてこられたものを引き継ぐに  
あたり、かなり緊張しておりました。  
今後とも何卒、  
よろしくお願いいたします。  
個人的にはエストを  
色々描かせて頂けて  
大満足でした！  
ニーソ！  
(^▽^)o多  
ニーソ！  
(^▽^)o多

ネコ好きさんや  
ワレプスカーレットをば♡



Readers who are meeting me for the first time, and those who already know me, greetings. This is Shimesaba Kohada.

Starting Volume 17, I'll be responsible for illustrating Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance.

I am very nervous to have to live up to the successes of the author Shimizu-sensei and illustrators Sakura Hanpen-sensei and Nimura Yuuji-sensei.

Pleased to meet everyone.

Personally, I am very happy to draw Est in all kinds of situations!

Kneesocks! (° ▽ °)o≡° Kneesocks ! (° ▽ °)o≡°